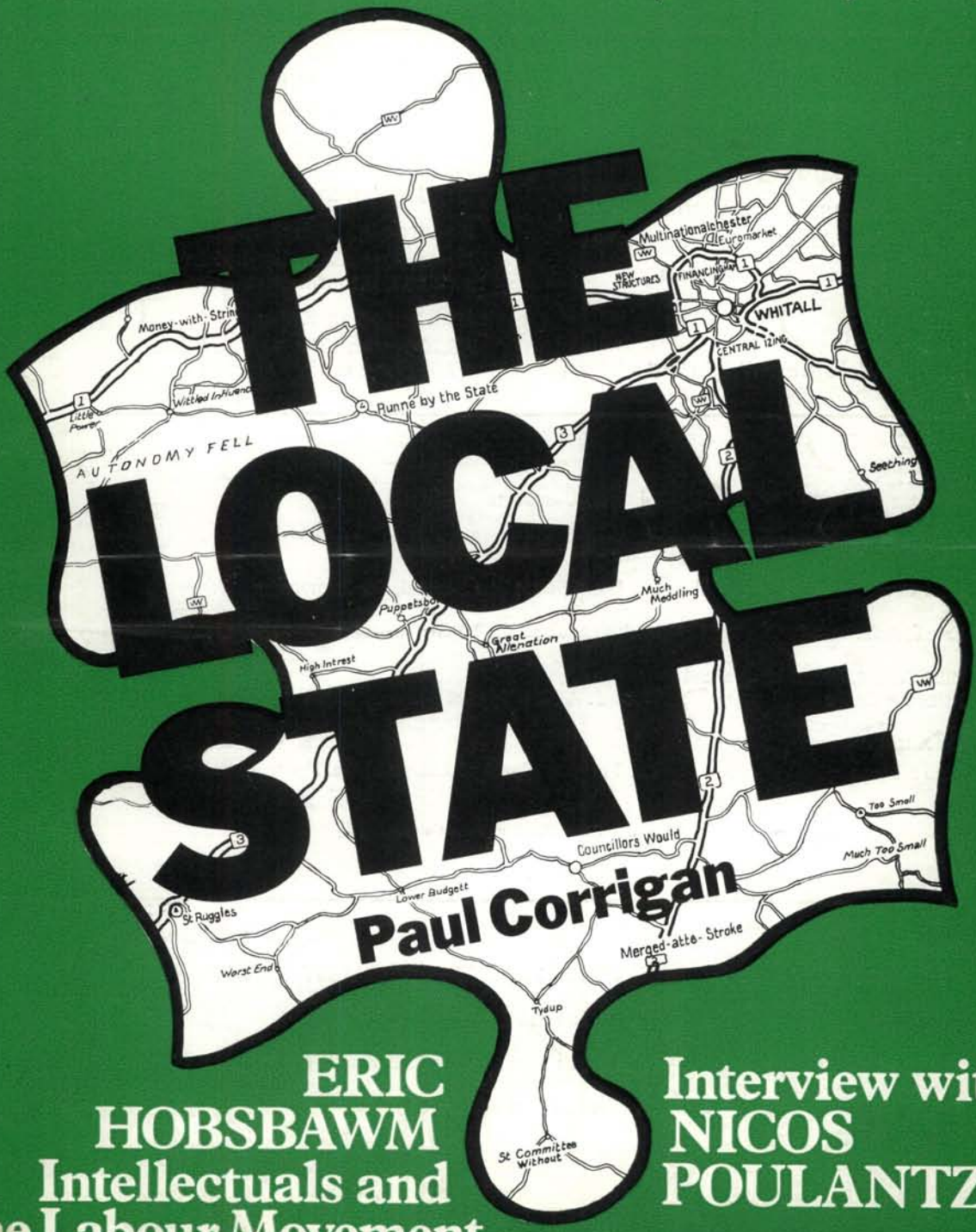
Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

July 1979 40 pence



ERIC HOBSBAWM
Intellectuals and the Labour Movement

Interview with NICOS POULANTZAS

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 23, Number 7

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Orders and Subscriptions
Usual Agents or Central Books Ltd., 14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER

Subscription Rates
£5.10 per annum UK and Eire
£7.00 per annum Abroad

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Editorial Comments

THE ITALIAN ELECTIONS

The recent elections in Italy were brought about by the decision of the Communist Party to abandon its policy of tacit support for the Christian Democratic government of Giulio Andreotti. As expected, these elections have failed to resolve the basic question of parliamentary power and the Christian Democrats are still without a majority. Voting produced no real shift to the Left, and the combined forces of the Left are almost as strong as before. However, the Communist Party has lost ground and its share of the vote has fallen from 34.4 per cent to 30.4 per cent: the first time the PCI has lost votes in the last 30 years. Many potential supporters abstained and others voted for the small Radical Party which has campaigned vigorously on social issues such as abortion, housing and civil liberties. Broadly speaking, the Communists have lost among those sections of society worst hit by the present crisis—young people, sub-proletarians in the South, and slum dwellers in the North—many of whom feel disillusioned by the lack of progress during the past three years, and by the failure of the Communist Party to lead an effective struggle on their behalf. Amongst the organised working class the Communist vote has held up fairly well, although there were some losses in big cities like Turin and Milan where the radicals attracted a large protest vote. Most disturbing, perhaps, is the loss of support amongst young people: the proportion of first time voters who voted Communist fell from 40 per cent in 1976 to 28 per cent in 1979.

These results represent a major setback for Communists and have already opened up a debate about where the Party went wrong and what should be its future direction. There are already signs of a serious debate within the leadership and it is possible that the entire strategy of compromise with the Christian Democrats will come under attack.

The experience of the Communist Party during the past three years has been difficult and complex. In 1976, after gaining a huge increase in their vote, the Communists proposed a government of national unity in which they would have cabinet posts and enjoy some real power. When this was refused they made a compromise. In return for some limited concessions, they agreed to abstain in Parliament and allow the Christian Democrats to form a minority government. Outside of Parliament they took a relatively conciliatory line and argued for moderation and compromise on the major issues of the day. This new line handicapped the Party in various ways. Communists became associated with unpopular policies over which they had no real control, and they failed to mobilise effective opposition to these policies. Instead of being able to lead the struggle for reform, they were obliged to act as mediators between the Christian Democrats on the one hand, and the pressures for change on the other. This position caused confusion and uncertainty within the Party and weakened its base of support. Eventually the strain became too great and the Party withdrew its support from the Christian Democratic government, went into opposition, and ultimately forced the General Election.

The CPI is now facing some important decisions. How far should it carry its opposition to the Christian Democrats? How far should it mobilise its immense reserves of strength in the organised working class? What should be its objectives in the coming period? How far can it recover the support it has lost? These are difficult questions, and the answers to them will obviously be profoundly influenced by the events and setbacks of the past three years.

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Interview with Nicos Poulantzas

(Nicos Poulantzas is one of the most influential figures in the renewal in European Marxism. He was born in Greece and is a member of the Greek Communist Party (Interior). He has lived and taught in Paris for over a decade. His writing has been primarily concerned with the theory of the state and of politics—in particular Political Power and Social Classes (1973) *and* Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (1975). *He has increasingly been concerned with problems of political strategy under the diverse conditions of European capitalism:* Fascism and Dictatorship (1974); The Crisis of the Dictatorship (1976) *and* State, Power, Socialism (1978).)

THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY STUART HALL AND ALAN HUNT.[1]

Your books are now widely influential in Britain but I think that it would be useful for people here to know something more about your personal political and intellectual development.

Well let us say that I first met Marxism through French culture and through Sartre, as did many people of my class situation and of my age in Greece. At that time I was beginning to be able to work for myself at the age of seventeen or eighteen. We were in the post-Civil War situation, with the Communist Party declared illegal, which lasted until 1974. The conditions for the circulation of Marxist ideas were extremely difficult. It was impossible even to acquire the classical texts of Marxism and as a result I came to Marxism through French philosophy and through Sartre in particular. When I was at University I became involved in my first political activity on the Left, with the student unions or syndicates and then I joined EDA (United Democratic Left), that being a broad legal form of the Communist Party. At that time, however, I was not a member of the Communist Party.

After my law studies I came to Western Europe and at that time I continued to be actively involved in membership of EDA. But the big problem within EDA was that some of them were Communists and some were not; it was a kind of popular front organisation, but absolutely under the dominance of the Communist Party and without any real autonomy.

Developing an interest in Marxism through Sartre, I was much influenced by Lucien Goldmann and by Lukacs. My doctoral thesis was undertaken in the philosophy of law, in which I tried to develop a conception of law drawing on Goldmann and Lukacs. It was published in 1964; but from the moment it was published I began to feel the limitations of that orientation within Marxism. At this time I began to encounter Gramsci through *Critica Marxista* which was the most important journal of Marxism at that time.

I began also to work with Althusser, while still being influenced—as I always am—by Gramsci—which created a kind of agreement and disagreement, from the beginning, with Althusser. It would take too long now to explain the kind of differences I had, which were not so much with Althusser but rather more with Balibar. With Althusser's first texts, which were mainly philosophical and methodological, I profoundly agreed and I always felt that Althusser has a kind of understanding in relation to the class struggle and its problems. The problem of structuralism was more a problem with Balibar than with Althusser. In *Political Power and Social Classes* there are definite differences between the text of Balibar and my text. I have spoken a little about these differences in *Social Classes in Contemporary Capitalism.*

Meanwhile I joined the Greek Communist Party before the split in 1968, which came one year after the colonels' coup and since than I have been in the Communist Party of the Interior. The Communist Party of the Interior has moved towards the Euro-Communist line. The Greek Communist Party of the Exterior, on the other hand, is one of the last Stalinist parties in Europe. I mean that in the strongest sense—in the sense of theoretical dogmatism, the total absence of internal democracy, and total dependency towards the Soviet Union.

Your theoretical writings suggest that political alliances play a very central role in the project for a democratic socialism. Yet the alliance between the Communist Party of France (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS) has proved to be very fragile. What lessons do you think can be learnt?

Well, I think that the main problem is not so much that of political alliances between political organisations. The main problem, as we know, is the political alliance between the classes and class fractions which are represented by those parties, because one of the lessons of the failure of this

[1] This interview took place in Coventry on April 5, 1979. Thanks are due to Phil Jones and Bob Jessop for assistance with the interview and to Sheila Ford for transcribing and typing the original interview.

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alliance in France is exactly that it has mainly been seen and constructed as an alliance from the top. One cannot say it was a pure electoral alliance: it was not, because the "Common Programme of the Left" is a very significant fact in the history of the European Left. It was not a pure conjunctural electoralist type of alliance; but nevertheless it was very significant that neither of these parties tried to found this alliance in the base—that is, amongst the masses—by creating common organisations. We had some type of common actions in some organisations, between those organised by the parties and the trade unions, but we never achieved an original or specific type of organisation at the base which could crystallise this type of alliance. This was also a traditional failure of the "popular front" type of alliance. In the Third International strategy, Dimitrov was always saying that we must have specific types of base organisation, crystallising this type of alliance. This was not achieved during that period, nor has it been achieved by the Communist Party of France or the Socialist Party. But nevertheless your question goes much further. I think that the realisation of this type of alliance is only possible, given a change within the Communist Parties themselves. It is very clear that as long as you are working with the conception of the "dictatorship of proletariat" you are not going to be able to make a durable alliance with a partner who knows he is going to be eliminated during the transition to socialism when that dictatorship is implemented. So I think that revolutionary strategy towards democratic socialism requires the changes that have occurred in some Communist Parties of Western Europe and this is one of the conditions for achieving new forms of political alliance.

Now we come to the problem of Social Democracy, which is a very specific problem and which demonstrates that this question of alliances has much to do with the actual conditions of the specific country; and consequently that we must be cautious about making generalisations because we see that Social Democracy plays quite different political roles in the different countries in which it exists. For example, I do not see any possibility of political alliances with the type of Social Democracy you have in West Germany, or in Sweden. The situation is different in countries where Social Democracy is not a governmental party, as it has not been for many years in France. Then, in the present structural crisis of capitalism, we can see a shift of Social Democracy towards the Left and this is one of the conditions for a more durable alliance between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. I do not think we can speak of Social Democracy in general any more, given this structural crisis of capitalism. We cannot find, I think, a general tendency of the bourgeoise to employ Social Democracy as a solution to the crisis. Nor does the bourgeoisie have the economic power in all societies to offer to the working class the types of compromises that are needed for Social Democracy to have its political function fulfilled when it is in government, especially in the context of the austerity programmes we have now in Europe. It is not clear at all that a social democratic solution, which involves compromises with the working class, can be realised by the bourgeoisie through Social Democracy in the particular circumstances of each individual country in Europe. In these circumstances Social Democracy does not have any other solution than alliance with the Communist Party. In this specific type of situation (which is very different from the other types of situation) you find the integration of Social Democracy in the governmental apparatus, as in West Germany. I do not wish to comment on the situation in Britain but in Germany it is a very peculiar situation because Germany plays a dominating economic role in the Common Market, and so it still has possibilities of compromise with its working class. This is not the case at all in Italy or France and most probably also not the case in Spain. We should not speak nowadays, given the structural crisis of capitalism, of Social Democracy in general.

Do you think this means that there is no longer a problem of "reformism" in general for the Left?

No, I do not mean that; especially given the double character of the Social Democracy—that is, on the one hand trying to achieve a modernisation of capitalism but nevertheless, on the other, having deep roots in the working class. The problem confronting Social Democracy is to make the combination of the two; and given the structural crisis of capitalism, the inter-imperialist contradictions, and the uneven developments, the situation of Social Democracy in Europe is extremely different from one country to another. This game can be played in economically dominant countries in Europe like West Germany, and Sweden; but it cannot be played by Social Democracy in France or in Italy. In such conjunctures I think that one of the solutions for the Social Democratic parties is the left turn towards an alliance with the Communist Parties.

You have already mentioned the question of Euro-Communism. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Euro-Communism is not a single phenomenon but that there are a number of diverse trends within what is called Euro-Communism. Do you think that it is helpful to distinguish between trends that can be labelled left and right?

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We speak here of general tendencies and one must not first personalise and then make a fetish of this distinction in a phenomenon which is relatively new. Now, in the strategy of the Third International, which was a strategy of dual power and frontal smashing of the state, the problem of reformism was in some sense a clear and an easy one. Everything was "reformist" which did not lead to the creation of dual power and achieving the possibilities of a frontal clash with the state. Now, when we speak of a democratic road to democratic socialism, such a strategy must not only profoundly transform but also maintain forms of representative democracy and forms of liberties (what we have called for a long time "formal liberties" but which are not just "formal"). This representative democracy must, at the same time, go hand in hand with the creation of direct democracy at the base. But the first point is important; if we can no longer speak of a sudden clash with the state but of the maintenance of and profound deepening of institutions of representative democracy under socialism, then the distinction between reformism and a revolutionary road becomes much more difficult to grasp, even if nevertheless it continues to exist.

It is very clear that in Euro-Communism you can find the reformist tendency and in this sense I think one can speak of a left wing and of a right wing Euro-Communism. For example, I think that when Elleinstein speaks of a gradual, peaceful, legal, progressive revolution, this is exactly the classical Kautskian way of posing these questions. But what would be the proper distinction between a left wing and a right wing Euro-Communism? There are a number of them. First of all, the question of the importance given to direct and workers' council democracy, which has always been a decisive continuum between reformist and a revolutionary road to socialism. Left wing Euro-Communism gives a much greater significance to rank and file democracy. The second one is the types of ruptures and the types of transformation envisaged in the very state itself: because even if we do not speak about "smashing the state", nevertheless left Euro-Communism is very conscious of the problem of the necessity of radical transformation, not only of the ideological apparatuses of the state but also of the repressive apparatuses themselves: whereas right wing Euro-Communism tends to see those apparatuses more or less as neutral apparatuses and consequently does not attach the same importance to their transformation. Left Euro-Communism retains the insistence on the moment of rupture in the state itself. It does not speak of a gradual progressive transformation of the state. It is very conscious that there will be a decisive turning point, which is not going to be a civil war but is nevertheless going to be a profound crisis of the state, with a shift in the balance of forces inside the state itself. Right wing Euro-Communism does not examine this alternative very seriously. To be concrete whenever I have read Carrillo I have seen more right wing Euro-Communism positions and whenever I have read Ingrao of the PCI I have found more left wing Euro-Communism positions.

I think more and more that Euro-Communism is a specific phenomenon of *advanced* capitalist social formations. The whole problematic of the democratic road to socialism, of the revolutionary road to democratic socialism, is closely related to the specific stage of capitalist development.

For you and for us the Italian experiment of the "historic compromise" is of enormous importance. Now in such a situation what sort of importance do you attach to the need for the establishment of some kind of national consensus?

I do not have much confidence in this conception of national consensus. The Italian Communists themselves have never presented the historical compromise as a type of transition to socialism. Sometimes they have come close to saying this, but most of the time they have presented it as a specific strategy in a specific conjuncture in Italy; they have not presented it as a general model for the transition to socialism. Now, we have a second question, which is the famous question posed by Berlinguer after the Chile coup, about the importance of a broad national consensus. Well, I am very dubious about this position. There is a kind of analysis that derives from the Gramscian tradition and which is one of the most disputed points in Gramsci, where he suggests that the working class can have an ideological and political hegemony *before* achieving political power. To me the question of national consensus must be seen much more in the *process* of democratic socialism rather than as a *pre-condition* of democratic socialism itself. To say that one needs 80 per cent of the people in order to create the unity necessary for a left government is a contradiction in terms.

You yourself are a member of the Greek Communist Party of the Interior and perhaps we can now turn our attention to the situation in Greece. In last year's elections the alliance in which your party participated, suffered a serious electoral setback, particularly at the hands of the orthodox Greek Communist Party. What is your analysis of this experience and how do you account for the attraction of the oppositionist strategy of the orthodox party? What lessons can you derive from this?

Well there are some general reasons and there are

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reasons which have to do more specifically with Greece. The general reasons have to do with the insufficient analysis and insufficiently coherent strategy within Euro-Communism itself. If the Euro-Communist turning point is taken by a constituted Communist Party, there is no possible contestation of this turning point, apart from that by the extreme left. But if you have a situation of a split, with the majority of the party being in an orthodox position, the lack of sufficient analysis of revolutionary strategy on the part of Euro-Communism becomes much more critical when you have to cope with the dogmatic fractions of the party. Then we have reasons which have to do very specifically with Greece and which are linked to the question of the Greek Civil War. I refer to the whole imagery and symbolic position of revolution during the Civil War. It has been the Communist Party of the Exterior, most of whose members were very active in the Civil War and who were exiled in other countries and have come back after 1974, which has been best able to mobilise this popular imagery of the Civil War. Let us say that they have succeeded in what Lister failed to do in Spain because—exactly as I said before—Carrillo has been able to make the turning point towards Euro-Communism in the Communist Party itself. It also has to do with the social conditions in Greece.

The Greek working class is a very feeble working class because most of Greek capital is not indigenous capital, it is a bourgeoisie rooted in the Mediterranean area and big shipping capital and so on. So the Greek working class does not have a very high level of class consciousness. You very rarely find in Greece a family where father and son are workers. We have a high social mobility into the petty bourgeoisie. We have some of the working class who become petty bourgeois and who migrate and become agents of the international Greek bourgeoisie. Either they come here to London and work in the shipping companies or they go to America. To me there is a feebleness of the Greek working class which has a relationship to the success of dogmatism in Greece nowadays. And of course it has to do with the errors of the Greek Communist Party—for example, the fact that, for long, we have tried to seek the official approval of the Soviet Union—not being able to make real criticisms of the Soviet Union and not being able to make a real alliance for the democratic road to socialism, because we hoped that the Soviet Union would choose between the two parties! This has been a very negative factor in the development of the Greek Party of the Interior.

Can we turn to some theoretical questions? It seems as if there has been at some point a quite decisive turn with respect to Leninism. Would you like to comment on that?

That is absolutely true. I think that if there is a turning point it has been expressed in my book *The Crisis of Dictatorships* and it comes from very definite positions I took during the period of the Greek dictatorship. During that period we had two lines in the Greek Communist Party of the Interior. The one was the line of a (violent or less violent) frontal opposition to the dictatorship regime of external frontal opposition. The other line was one that thought that one could employ or utilise the internal contradiction between the fractions of the dominant class and the internal contradictions of the military regime.

After six or seven years of dictatorship I began to grasp theoretically and politically that these conceptions of the military dictatorship were associated with some views held by Marxists about the state itself. The state is seen as a kind of closed place which can be taken only by an external type of strategy, whether it be the Leninist frontal type of strategy or the Gramscian type of encircling of the state. In its place I began to think of the state as a condensation, a relation of forces, I developed this idea in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. At the same time I was beginning to see the significance that this could have for the strategy of opposition to the military regimes. Also I began to apply this conception of the state to the problem of the transition to socialism, which became clearer in my last book, *State, Power, Socialism*. It is clear to me that there is a crisis, and that crisis involves Leninism as such.

I think that the position with regard to Lenin is not exactly what my position is towards Leninism. I do not think that one can simply say that Lenin was only right with respect to the Soviet Union. I think one of the big insights of Lenin, as a strategist, and in which I believe, is not Leninist centralism, it is that Lenin was a convinced supporter of the rank and file and of the direct democracy of the Soviets. The thing that Rosa Luxemburg opposed in Lenin was not that he was too much of a centralist, or too oppressive toward the working class; it was much more that he crushed all the institutions of representative democracy and left only the institution of direct democracy of the Soviets. I think this is the Lenin that we can still employ. This is the Lenin of *The State and Revolution*, which is the most important Lenin. I think this is the positive aspect of Lenin.

The negative aspect involves the whole question of the application and the theorisation of the dictatorship of proletariat which revolves around the total smashing of representative democracy. It is not true to say that Lenin was not able to do anything else because of the conditions of the civil war

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in the Soviet Union; nor that he could not do otherwise because of the different trends within the party. I think that there are some theoretical elements in Leninism itself that were related to both the situation during Lenin's period and afterwards under Stalin. There were definitely elements of centralisation and a conception of the party as bringing consciousness to the working class from the outside. This includes *What Is To Be Done?* which is an aspect of Leninism in which I do not believe any more. Further, I think that this conception of the party leads directly to the conception of "the State Party" and then to statism.

Can we return to the question of Althusser. In Fascism and Dictatorship *you make this specific criticism of Althusser, that he does not give the class struggle the place it deserves. Is it possible in Marxist structuralism of the Althusserian kind, to give the class struggle the place it deserves?*

In the way you posed the question, you have already given the answer, because you have spoken of structuralism. I have not. You would have to accept, first of all, that there is a global Althusserian conception, which I do not believe myself; most of us had so many differences between Balibar, Althusser and myself, not to mention others; we had huge differences at the beginning.

For Althusser himself, or what one can still retain from Althusserianism, I think that the problematic of structuralism is a false problematic applied to the basic guide lines of Althusserian thought. I do not think that it is true that Althusser, in his epistemological guide lines really has—in the theoretical conception itself—an absence, due to a theoretical impossibility, of history and of class struggle. I think there is a problem in this respect with Balibar, but not even with all of Balibar. So I would say that structuralism has not been the very essence of Althusserianism but it has been the *malade infantile*. There are some remnants of structuralism in Althusser and in the rest of us, in the theoretical conjuncture in which we were working; it was structuralism against historicism; it was Levi Strauss against Sartre. It has been extremely difficult for us to make a total rupture, from those two problematics. We insisted that for Marxism the main danger was not structuralism but historicism itself, so we directed all our attention against historicism—the problematic of the subject; against the problematics of Sartre and of Lukacs, and as a result we "bent the stick"; and of course this had effects in our theory itself. For example, it has had effect in my books in the distinction I made between "structures" and "practices" in *Political Power and Social Classes* which I did not pursue afterwards in *Social Classes in Contemporary Capitalism.*

The remark I made in *Fascism and Dictatorship* with reference to Althusser concerned the ideological state apparatuses; it was a reproach I made to Althusser in the specific context of the discussion of the ideological state apparatuses and not a reproach about the core of the problematic with which we were then concerned. So I would still stand by the critical role of Althusserianism rather than with the substantive analysis.

Much of your writing has been directed towards questions of the state and of politics, based upon the concept of "relative autonomy". What is your assessment of the capacity of a theory based on a concept of "relative autonomy" to grapple with the problems of the specificity of the state and of politics?

I will answer this question very simply because we could discuss it for years. It is very simple. One must know whether one remains within a Marxist framework or not; and if one does one accepts the determinant role of the economic in the very complex sense; not the determination of forces of production but of relations of production and the social division of labour. In this sense, if we remain within this conceptual framework, I think that the most that one can do for the specificity of politics is what I have done. I am sorry to have to speak like that.

I am not absolutely sure myself that I am right to be Marxist; one is never sure. But if one is Marxist, the determinant role of relations of production, in the very complex sense, must mean something; and if it does, one can only speak of "relative autonomy" —this is the only solution. There is, of course, another solution, which is not to speak of the determinant role of the economic at all. The conceptual framework of Marxism has to do with this very annoying thing which is called "relations of production" and the determinant role of relations of production. If we abandon it then, of course, we can speak of the autonomy of politics or of other types of relations between politics and economics.

But I suppose that one way of staying somewhere within the Marxist framework for understanding the relation between politics and economics without attempting to derive one from the other, even in a very complex way, is to posit the notion of "the conditions of existence" which one practice forms for another. What do you think of this alternative?

For example if one talks not of relative autonomy; but of "conditions of existence"; such a position does not escape the difficulty; all that it achieves is

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to translate the same difficulty into other words. If you say that something is the condition of existence or the necessary pre-conditions of existence of another instance you are still within the relative autonomy framework. Whatever type of formulation you give to it you still have the same core problem. Do we believe or not in a determinant role of relations of production? And if we do you are always going to be limited in the autonomy of politics in whatever way you can express it. The problem still remains, how to find the specificity and the autonomy without falling into the absolute autonomy of politics. It is the core of the Marxist problematic. Now we can probably formulate it better but this question of determination is the central core of Marxism.

The question was posed concerning the relation between "economics" and "politics", but of course the question also requires us to ask what we mean by "economics". Once you include class struggle and then you examine the relative autonomy of the state with respect to the dominant classes and to the class struggle then the problem of economics is different. The question has two terms, politics and economics, which we had to clarify in advance. When I speak of the final determination by the economic I already include the relations of production of social classes and of class struggle. There is no "economy as such" and then class struggle on another level. So when I speak of "the relative autonomy of the economic" already the economic has this other sense which embraces the presence of class struggle.

In addition we should note a further danger. If we speak only in terms of apparatuses we have another danger, that of institutionalisation. Apparatuses, after all, are material condensations of relations. In the famous example, it is not the church that created religion, it is religion that created the church. So if we speak in terms of apparatuses, of course, we can clarify the debate: but still we displace it, because we can speak only in terms of enterprises and apparatuses which already presuppose the relations of production themselves.

In your latest book you seek to develop a notion of "authoritarian statism" which I understand as being the intensification of state control associated with the decline in political democracy. Is this theory simply a more sophisticated version of the much more traditional Leninist thesis that monopoly capitalism necessarily tends towards authoritarianism? Is it not true that the political reality of the experience of European and North American capitalism, is that intensified state control has developed alongside *an expanding area of political democracy?*

This question raises a more general problem: can we find significant differences between *forms* of state that correspond to different stages of capitalism? It is certain that under monopoly capitalism, as seen by Lenin, the state has gone through very significant modifications which existed under fascism and also in the New Deal; you can find some common characteristics without resorting to a simple identification of these different regimes. In this sense you can speak in general of the fascist state and the parliamentary state as being two forms of capitalist state. You can find some common characteristics alongside the essential differences. What I tried to say about "authoritarian statism" was to find the general characteristics of a new phase of the state because I think that we are at a turning point in the organisation of the capitalist state. My object was to find a formulation that could designate the general characteristics of this turning point, without identifying it with a specific regime. So when I speak of "authoritarian statism" it does not mean that political democracy or representative democracy is going to end. "Authoritarian statism" can take extremely different forms. It can take neo-liberal forms as in France, or it can take a much more authoritarian form as in Germany. Nevertheless we are witnessing a decline of representative democracy in the classical sense without implying that there is a trend towards fascism. I tried therefore to distinguish between "authoritarian statism" and fascism.

I think my anxiety can be expressed in terms of the political implications that flow from your conception of "authoritarian statism". The democratic transition to socialism to which you are committed depends upon the possibility, prior to any advance towards socialism itself, of creating the conditions for an expanded democracy. Yet the possibility of achieving this democratic advance would seem to be more remote as a result of the advance of "authoritarian statism".

This is the whole problem. It is the question of rupture. The thing that I want to point out is that what democratic socialism requires is a deepening and an extension of liberties, of representative institutions and so on. This can not occur without a deep transformation of social and economic conditions. This is the conclusion that I draw: that you cannot struggle to expand political rights and liberties is a defensive position against the authoritarian tendency of today's capitalism. But I believe that we cannot save political democracy any more without profound modifications of the social and economic structures of capitalism itself.

Can I ask you to clarify your idea of "authoritarian

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statism". Is it merely a phase of the "interventionist state" or is it a distinct new type of state succeeding the liberal and the interventionist state?

I am not entirely clear myself because there is a general difficulty about the stages of capitalism. The Leninist conception was of two stages, the first that of industrial capitalism, the second stage that of monopoly capitalism. I have held the view that in these stages, we can have different phases but we cannot speak of a third stage. But I am no longer so certain about this position. Within this framework, "authoritarian statism" could not be a distinct stage as long as we retained the commitment to two stages. But now I think the problems are much more complicated. My earlier discussion of them very much revolved around the theory of state monopoly capitalism, and the debate within the PCF on this topic. Now I think that, even if we speak of phases of interventionist states, the contemporary transformations of the capitalist state are not therefore simply a phase; something much more important is involved in the emergence of "authoritarian statism".

You tend to talk about the current stage of "authoritarian statism" in the context of the intensification of generic elements of political crisis as well as economic crisis. This begins to sound as if you are suggesting that the final stage of capitalism has arrived.

Yes, I see the problem. It is a danger which I was not very conscious of and now I see when you speak of it. I see very clearly that there is a danger but I want to stress that it requires us to consider what we mean by the structural crisis of capitalism. In my text *The Crisis of the State* I try to analyse this structural crisis of capitalism, taking issue with some of the conceptions of the French Communist Party, and insist that the existence of such a crisis does not imply that it cannot be resolved.

What is the connection between this discussion of the state and the emphasis which you place on the role of the single dominant mass party?

I have tried to say that even if you do not have the massive, dominant governmental party what you do find is a relationship between two parties that are able to exchange political power between themselves. I had in mind the German model or even the British model, where even within the core of the state apparatus you could find a mixing of forces of Labour or Conservative, or of Social Democrats and of Christian Democrats, which tends to function as a single mass party of the bourgeoisie, in spite of the differences that might exist between them. Even if we do have ordinary governmental changes in this sense they are superficial changes in the face of an institutionalised core of forces belonging to both parties.

Can we turn to the question of your conception of Socialism. You now oppose a simple Leninist or vanguardist conception of "the party". In the concluding chapter of State, Power, Socialism, *you talk about the need to combine forms of direct democracy and forms of representative democracy. But you do not explicitly discuss how these two different forms are to be articulated or combined.*

The problem is that these are extremely new questions, and we are increasingly becoming aware that we do not have any positive theory of democracy in Marx. We have the theory of capitalist democracy and the theory of dictatorship of the proletariat. But we do not really have this positive evaluation and theoretical foundation for the type of the articulation between direct and representative democracy. Now it is clear that, as long as we speak of representative democracy, the relative separation is still going to exist between the public and private sphere. This leads us to the more complex problem—of the relative separation of the state not being simply a question relating only to *capitalist* relations of production. If it is not necessarily tied to capitalist relations of production then perhaps the very question of the relative separation in capitalist relations of production itself becomes much more problematic. This is the first problem.

The second problem is about the vanguard party. We must be very clear. As soon as we speak of a plurality of parties in the transition to socialism and as long as we take this conception seriously, it is evident that you cannot "have your cake and eat it". It is very clear that in the Leninist tradition (although Lenin himself did not have a conception of the one party system) the conception of the vanguard party goes hand in hand with the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the one party system. You can not, at the same time, say we are going to have a pluralism of parties and maintain the Leninist conception of the vanguard party because such a conception of the party implies or even requires the single party system. You cannot have both of them.

Consider the political party; I am not sure at all that a political party is the best form of organising even, in their differences, the new forms of social movements. For example, I am not sure at all that we must ask a revolutionary political party, to take under consideration the ecological problem, the feminist problem and so on. So the problem is not

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only to have a party so good that it is not only going to be political but take up every sphere of social life and economic life. I think that this conception of the party as the unique centraliser, even if it is a very subtle centralisation, is not necessarily the best solution. I think more and more that we must have autonomous social movements whose type of organisation cannot be the same as that of a political party organisation. There must be a feminist movement outside the most ideal possible party because the most ideal party cannot include such types of social movements even if we insist that the revolutionary party must have certain conceptions of the woman question.

Secondly, does the party have a central role? Of course it has a central role as long as it believes that politics has a central role, and as long as the state has a central role. But then as long as we need some type of organisation, we must have a type of centralism or a type of homogeonisation of differentiations if we must make this articulation between representative democracy and direct democracy. If, up to the present, this centralising role has been played by the single party, in future some aspects of this role must be transferred from the party itself to the representative organs where many parties can play their own role. We must have this differentiation and non-identification between party and the state. And if representative institutions can really play their full role, the type of relations, or articulation will not have to be transmitted as in the past, through the party itself. In Italy, for example, in the regional assemblies with Communist and Socialist majorities, the co-ordination between forms of direct democracy, movements of citizens, ecological movements on the one hand and the representative democracy does not pass through the centralisation provided by the Communist Party itself.

An interesting problem, to which we do not have definite answers is (and of this I am profoundly confident) that pluralism of parties in the democratic road to socialism means necessarily changes in the function of the party itself. You cannot have, at the same time, the traditional Leninist conception of the party, and simply say that there ought to be other parties also. This does not work.

What must be the differentiation, what must be the transformation of the party? I do not believe that the party should be lost in or amalgamated with the different types of social movements. But nor can the party, as a cadre apparatus, successfully link the many different social or economic movements. We must also reconsider the classical view of Leninist centralism in which everything political is primary and the remainder is secondary. What is the feminist movement, what is the ecological movement, what are the other types of social movement? These are not mere secondary movements in relation to the working class movement or to the party. Otherwise, everything becomes secondary. This question of primary and secondary relations must be rethought.

If Euro-Communism, like Marxism itself, is in crisis, it is because we are in an experimental stage where parties are trying to work out this different type of strategy. We see what is happening in Spain for example, we see what is happening in Italy; even in France we are in crisis; in France it is perhaps more difficult because the PCF functions as the French party has always functioned. It is also the party which sometimes makes the biggest breaks and then swings back; it goes from the most open party (for example, you have never seen any Communist Party so open to the question of women as the PCF), to the other side.

In this process there is a drawing back towards a traditional response, we see this clearly in the PCF. The changing conception of the party lies at the heart of these responses. There is an important response within the different parties which says "where are these new positions leading us" and they draw back in alarm. You find it also in Italy, you find it in Spain and in the other parties. This is not surprising because as yet there are no definite answers to these problems. But these are the problems which we must tackle; they will not go away, nor can we simply retreat to the old orthodoxy.

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Academic Press

London New York San Francisco
A Subsidiary of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers
24-28 Oval Road, London NW1, England
111 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, USA

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The Local State: the Struggle for Democracy

Paul Corrigan

(The writer is a lecturer at Warwick University and Communist Parliamentary Candidate for Coventry North-East).

Over recent years a new phrase has emerged into socialist thought in Great Britain, the "local state". This new concept has grown up in two different contexts, both of which have provided it with a lot of early "life and verve". Firstly, it has grown up as a part of the progress in critical Marxist work. This new flowering of British Marxism has covered a wide range of areas of interest and has grown at both a historical and a theoretical level. Some of the best and most politically fertile work has been carried out in this area by the Community Development Projects. These were bodies that were funded both by central and local government to try and find out the causes and the solutions to inner city deprivation. In this setting Marxists began to redevelop most fruitfully their understanding of that most important set of institutions, "the state". Secondly, the concept of the local state has come to be used in the massive expansion of the day-to-day struggles of progressive groups within the community. Most of these struggles seem to take place between small sections of the working class and their allies, and the state. The experiences gained from these struggles sometimes set up an opposition between the "community" and "the state"; an opposition that this article will try to attack.

Therefore, given both these aspects of its pedigree, in both the theory and practice of socialist politics, it is not surprising that such a concept should now enter into the everyday language of socialists. This article is to try and give one view on the direction and usefulness of the concept for us. To achieve this we must fully relate it to the mainstream of socialist politics.

Nature of the Concept

Probably the first thing to stress is the nature of the concept. I do not see the "local state" as a Marxist concept with the same explanatory power and internal consistency of, say the concept of class, or hegemony. Rather this is a *contingent* political tool: that is one that has a specific explanatory usefulness at a particular time. Such a concept will not be so clearly open to a simple definition, rather its definition will, I hope, unfold as the article and the politics that flows from the article, unfolds. It is however, perfectly legitimate to use such "contingent" concepts in a Marxist analysis. Indeed I think it was this sort of analysis that Lenin meant when he told his audience in a lecture on the state in 1919,

> "The chief thing you should acquire as a result of your reading . . . and talks on the state is the ability to approach this question independently since you will be meeting with it on the most diverse occasions, in connection with the most trifling questions, in the most unexpected contexts and in discussions and disputes with opponents." Lenin *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 260.

Here Lenin warns us, with his customary view to tactics, that we must at all times be aware that the state takes many forms. He is saying it will continually crop up in our social experience, in our analysis and in our political practice. He is also saying quite openly and clearly, that the view that the state is merely "bodies of armed men and prisons", is much too simplistic. Lenin does not develop this point but, predating Althusser by 50 years, he does underline the all pervasive nature of the state.

He goes beyond this though. He is bringing to our attention that, at different times, the nature and experience of the state changes dramatically and that we must be constantly aware of these changes if we are to make any progress in the struggle for socialism. The aim of this article is to fully uncover some of the overall changes in the restructuring of the British state that have taken place in the last few years. Indeed this article has a double agenda; firstly it wants to highlight the political importance of the local aspects of the state in the struggle for socialism and democracy; secondly it wants to outline and explain the overall changes in the state apparatus and show how these have all affected the local politics of the state.

Big Changes

To illustrate these points, let us look at a simple beginning to our day and see the importance of the changes in the local state. At some stage, early in

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the day, we use water (Water Boards restructured 1973) and sewerage (sewage removed from local democratic control 1973); we get on a bus (Passenger Transport Authorities reorganised 1975) and go to work (on roads within restructured local authorities 1973); our children are at school (changes in education 1964-79); our mum in the welfare (Social Service Reorganisation 1971); our rates have gone up (transformed relationship between central and local government finance 1964 to date), etc. All of these state experiences and, so far, not a mention of "bodies of armed men"!

The point of these examples is to underline three things; firstly, the importance of the state in British capitalist society; secondly, the fact that the state in these examples takes on a local character; thirdly to illustrate that every aspect of the British state has changed within, roughly, the last 15 years. The nature of these changes has not gone totally unnoticed, but its scale has. Nor has the speed of these changes and its importance for progressive democratic forces been fully comprehended. To fully outline the scale of changes would take a list of several thousand words. But the process started with the changes in London local government when the London County Council was replaced by the Greater London Council and many boroughs were amalgamated. The Wilson administration continued these changes in the sphere of central and local government with a transformation of Whitehall and changes in police authorities and social security. The pace of change quickened under the Heath regime with a major change in local government in both the representative democracy areas and in areas such as water boards. A major change in social service organisation spanned the Wilson/Heath governments, and a change in the organisation of public transport spanned the change back between Heath and Wilson. The points to make are that nearly everything has changed and that there seems to have been agreement between the actions of all governments without regard to political complexion.

What this article will point out is that all of these changes have involved in some way the movement of power away from localities and into more centralised bodies that can, at one and the same time, be more easily run from Whitehall and can be more easily insulated from local democratic pressure.

The importance of locality

Whilst I don't think it is possible to simply define this or that institution as a part of the "local state" in an analytically exact way, I still think the concept has great power. Its power is primarily of a *political*, practical nature, in that it highlights the local nature of state institutions. The political importance of locality is increasingly being recognised by revolutionary socialists in the UK. Its relevance was fully understood in the political work of the 30s and its stressing at the end of Dave Cook's analysis in the anti-racist pamphlet *A Knife at the Throat of us all* is to be welcomed. The local state then, is an arena of class struggle *in the locality*. It provides the opportunity of organising pressure and change in a local area of struggle, at all times recognising the influence of central government and the power of the multi-nationals in the struggles, but underlining that the consciousness of the great mass of working people is around local issues. Consequently, the concept of the "local state" highlights at one and the same time, the nature and power of the state in our society and the importance of organising struggle around state issues in the locality.

Perhaps two examples will clarify what I mean here. I pick these two examples to demonstrate that the state exists in the locality as an arena of local struggle in both the setting that we would expect, that is the local authority, *and* in settings that we consider as central government.

Council housing is considered an area "under the control" of local authorities. Each responsible authority has a housing committee that is "run" by local councillors who are democratically elected. However, over the past few years all of us involved in housing struggles will recognise how little power this committee has over such issues as the building and running of a new estate of council houses. Whilst one of the few attempts at restructuring the state that has been stopped, the Tory Housing Finance Act, would have diminished local powers even further, we know that real power does not fully reside with the councillors. It is true that if such political forces are worked with correctly then they will provide a strong alliance in struggling for power and resources in the locality, but the point I am making is that at the moment *power* does not reside in that locality, just the major constituents in the struggle *for* democratic local power.

If we look at a local supplementary benefits office it is obviously a part of a central government structure and, as such, has no direct local democratic control over its functions. Thus within the office the civil servant will say that he is following central government instructions with no discretion at all. They will say that all power resides in Whitehall. However all claimants know that there is a considerable discretion to be followed *both* by the individual officers and by the managers of local offices. In fact offices differ a great deal both in the social relationships of claiming and in the amount claimed. If this is the case then it is possible to affect this discretion through democratic struggle, perhaps composed of claimants organisations, the local trades council, the civil servants' unions and the representatives of local trade unions on tribunals. If such a group

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were to pressure a local office it would become an arena of the state involved in struggle at the locality. I would maintain then that politically, both of these examples illustrate the importance of using the concept of the local state. Legally the one may be a part of a local authority and the other a part of a Whitehall department, but *politically* they can both be under democratic local pressure to change. Such a perspective obviously highlights those aspects of the state that can be opened up to local political pressure. However, whilst stressing that politically both are a part of the "local state" they are also very different state structures. The form of these structures provides one of the major constituents of struggle and it is the form of the state that I think it is essential for us to emphasise more strongly. This is something that I will return to later.

Changes in the State Structure in Great Britain 1962-80[1]

So far I have stressed the breadth of the change in the state structures over the period. It is important to try and uncover why all these changes have occurred and in what major direction they have moved.

The British Road to Socialism sees the changes that occur in state structures within society as being caused by the extent, form and nature of class struggle. Consequently we must begin the analysis of state change by looking at the way in which class struggle has interrelated with the state. Since monopoly capital remains the dominant class in Great Britain it should not surprise us that their interests have played a major role in this process of state restructuring. Thus the restructured state reflects their domination. But this restructuring has not taken place without the involvement of the massive British working class; the political and economic organisations of that class cannot simply be ignored by monopoly capital in anything that it does, since even though it does not have a revolutionary consciousness the working class does have some power in the society. Thus the British state does represent changes in the form and nature of the struggle between these two classes, a struggle still dominated by monopoly capital.

While monopoly capital is still dominant, it is important to realise that both the major classes have changed considerably, they have *not* simply been static over the period. Let us look at some of the changes that have occurred within monopoly capital and their effect upon the state.

It is important to explain why I have picked 1962 as a starting point for this process. Firstly, this was the year when the depth of the coming economic crisis for British capital was first understood by the state itself. For the previous 10-year period it had been possible to construct a minor boom in profitability, constructed around the remnants of British imperialism both at the level of protected markets and cheap raw materials. In this year the Board of Trade first noted the change, a change that by 1979 we can see affects *all* the social relationships of our society. What was the crisis that was viewed, then, on the horizon and what was the immediate and likely response to it?

The Economic Crisis

Since this is primarily an article on the state, a long description of the nature of the economic crisis is not necessary, but it had distinct characteristics that directly affected the restructuring of the state. Firstly, there was an obvious crisis of profitability of British manufacturing industry. Secondly this crisis would depend upon opening up new export markets. Those parts of British capital that were not doing badly had three major characteristics. Firstly, they were large; the bigger firms had managed to retain markets and profitability. Secondly, they were multinational; they could shift both markets and manufacturing across boundaries. Thirdly they had a large stake, not only in multinational industry but in finance capital. Over the subsequent 18 years that state has taken an active part in encouraging those aspects of capital and discouraging others. Thus we have seen the state encouraging mergers; encouraging those mergers across national boundaries; and encouraging the growth of the power of finance capital. Thus the state has not been neutral in building up the strength of those stronger aspects of capital.

Moreover, the state has seen it as necessary to involve itself in the labour force a great deal more. Thus the process of restructuring capital briefly outlined above automatically means that there must be changes in the nature of the labour force. Many of these changes take place at work and have a common appearance in the enormous number of "productivity" deals that have continued to happen for the working class. Restructuring the labour force also occurs at home though:

> "The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. . . . From a social point of view, therefore the working class even when not directly engaged in the labour process, is just as much an appendage of capital as the ordinary instruments of labour. . . ." *Marx Capital*, p. 572, Vol. 3.

Here Marx is highlighting the necessary involve-

[1] Much of this analysis is expanded and made even more practical in a forthcoming book *Towards Socialist Welfare Work* by Steve Bolger, Paul Corrigan, Jan Docking and Nick Frost. Macmillan.

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ment of capital with the worker outside of the workplace. It is of no interest to the capitalist that the worker is a part of a family, has need for recreation, has ties with a locality, likes living in a certain street, etc. What the capitalist wants is a pair of hands with a certain skill at the right place and at the right time. It is pointless for a capitalist to open a factory where there is no labour since even they realise in some small way that all value comes from labour power and they are penniless without it.

In the period that we are talking about, it was necessary for the state to interfere quite directly in the lives of working people to ensure that labour did make itself available for capital. At least it was necessary to make sure that workers actually moved to where the new factories were; that they did not fight too hard in preserving their own jobs. The first element of this strategy was fully introducing the idea of selling jobs. The Redundancy Payments Act, which most stewards now fully see as undermining struggles against closures very effectively, provided the first part of this strategy. Earnings Related Benefit for the first six months of unemployment also created the impression that workers would be just as well off on the dole as at work.

However these were insufficient to get workers to move. It was necessary to try as much as possible to break the ties of community and locality felt by working people. For to get people to move continually around the country (and lately around Europe) it is necessary to break their relationship with any particular area. This has a double effect, firstly it means that if you start getting people used to moving where capital wants them to work then they will move much easier next time. Thus in the struggles against redundancies at Chrysler in Coventry in 1975 many of the workers who had moved to Coventry from other places could actually be heard to express the fact that now they would have to move on again. Once you make your labour force rootless it is possible to keep them moving. Secondly, if the labour force is on the move they do not develop *political* relationships with an area, in other words they do not see the point of defending jobs or conditions, or social services in this locality because after all they will be moving on in the future. Consequently a mobile workforce does not fight for the politics of its locality, rather it acts in a way that takes from that locality without a great deal of political intervention.

Therefore one of the themes of the restructured state is the diminishing of locality as any form of reality in the state apparatus.

Restructuring the State

For these changes to be fully carried out in the restructuring of capital and the restructuring of labour, it was necessary to have a set of state apparatuses that were themselves restructured: sets of relationships that could deal much more effectively with the larger units of monopoly capital involved in this period. Thus, starting with the restructuring of London government, two major arguments emerge for the larger units of government. Firstly, that the size of all forms of social relationships of capitalism had in fact got bigger. Thus people travelled further to work; planning could only really have any force over a much wider area that related to these social relationships. Secondly, that the size of local authorities was inadequate to deal with the size of the new business enterprises that they had to deal with. Throughout the period, the Confederation of British Industries continually and systematically argued for bigger authorities along these lines. They combined this with a continued argument for tighter internal control over decision-taking so as to more easily meet the immediate needs of big firms. Thus the "corporate management" form of organisation was transferred from business to local authorities to allow them to make quicker decisions. Of course, as most Labour councillors will admit, these quicker decisions do actually mean less democracy but that is something the CBI rarely cares about in any case.

Size however was not the only major theme in the restructuring process. A greater tightening of control from the top downwards has also been a major bench mark of all the changes. The Plowden Report on Public Expenditure entered the debate in the late 1960s on better ways of controlling public expenditure, calling for much tighter controls on local authority expenditure. Many of these controls have been operated through tight control of the money market and through interest rates. But a real change in the actual organisation of the central/local relationship has also occurred. The number of circulars from Whitehall to local authorities has increased in number and in the scope of their coverage. The role of corporate management *within* each local authority ensures that the process of "orders from the top" is actually carried out, and the number and powers of the committees with the right actually to *spend* money within the local authority structure is greatly diminished. Thus, whereas in the past each committee had some form of autonomy over its spending rights, these are now all vested in the single Policy Advisory Committee; that committee is run effectively by the Chief Officer and the number of local authorities themselves has been reduced. Thus the real effective control over local authority expenditure has come down from over 3,500 committees to the control of some 142 Chief Officers. This process has created a tight dialectic in that there is now a much easier system of central control through this network and also at the same time a much more difficult system

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for local struggles and local democracy to affect decisions.

The reason that monopoly capital should be interested in obtaining tighter control of local authority expenditure is very obvious in the later 1970s. Obviously as far as the ruling class is concerned the proportion of money going in public expenditure is far too great. What is important though is that before the cuts in public expenditure were launched by monopoly capital the whole terrain on which that battle was to be fought out was greatly changed. Thus whilst the democratic and popular forces have been waging a strong campaign around the actual *content* of the cuts in this or that area, the machinery for implementing those cuts is now much, much smoother and the ability for local forces to fight against them is much diminished by changes in the *structure* of the state.

Thus whilst there have been heroic struggles against the cuts they have taken place within a structure that is *much less democratic* than previously, leaving very few openings to pressure from below. The most graphic example—in Clay Cross—was actually to abolish the council itself leaving a much less localised and much less democratic terrain to struggle within.

The restructuring of the whole state machine occurred then to bring it into line with the structures and needs of monopoly capital and at the direct expense of areas of local democracy. However before continuing with the analysis it is necessary to restate the theoretical position that all changes in the state are a result of *class struggle* not simply the wishes of monopoly capital. Thus we need to look to the actions of the working class over this period.

What was the working class doing at this time?

Throughout this period the politics of the working class are dominated not by Marxism but by social democracy. It is important to state though, that even given this non-revolutionary ideology, it does *not* mean that the working class is not involved directly in class struggle. This period is one of class struggle not simply in isolated cases around socialist militancy but also through the Parliamentary Labour Party and through other social democratic structures. By and large it is through social democracy that the working class becomes at all involved in the process of restructuring the state over this period. Let us not be in any doubt that even through social democratic ideology the working class does have a *direct* influence on the way in which this process occurs, for there are many ways in which a state can be restructured under capitalism. To be sure, the Chilean state has been restructured since the Pinochet coup; similar restructuring has occurred within other fascist countries. The strength of the working class movement in this country means that the whole set of changes cannot take place without *some* account being taken of their interests, even though those interests may be articulated through social democratic institutions.

Throughout this period, the Labour Party and Labour governments, take a consistent and powerful line. They are in favour of constructing a "more rational" form of state organisation. It was Wilson who was most in favour of the restructuring of British capital around larger monopoly capital in "the white hot heat of the technological revolution" (a set of state interventions enthusiastically carried out by the then Minister for Technology, Tony Benn); and at every stage in the process they were in favour of "rationalising" the British state into larger and larger units. Rationality and efficiency were the watchwords in their policy, a rationality and an efficiency that was totally constructed within capitalist social relationships. Within the Labour Party, by and large, the left agreed with this reorganisation and in many cases, enthusiastically, since they saw the state as an organisation which was crucial to the interests of working people and therefore a rational state with bigger units would provide them with a better organisation with which they would confront monopoly capital. Indeed to a large extent in many submissions to the Royal Commissions the Communist Party was also arguing for a similar policy. But members of both the Labour Party and the Communist Party found all these larger structures much more difficult for progressive struggle; Labour councillors became confused since they saw the "necessity" for such rationalisation but also experienced the new structures as anti-democratic. It has only been in the last two or three years that this confusion is being articulated in an alternative political position arguing for a return to smaller units; unfortunately this position has been articulated around a "return" as if the old structure was perfect.

However, by and large the working class' voice throughout this period has been seen to agree with the movement to larger units, since these units seemed to fit not only the needs of monopoly capital but also to build a stronger state in working class interests.

What was the alternative and how does this affect us now?

In Italy where the working class has a mass revolutionary party to articulate its demands, the question of the structure of the state has taken on crucial political importance. This has not been the case simply because in that country the question of working class state power under socialism is on the political agenda, but also because the PCI and the working class of Italy see that certain forms of state even under capitalism will provide a better spring-

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board for the struggle for socialism. Thus in putting forward its proposals for, for example, school governors, the PCI realise not only that they have an opportunity to play a full role in these positions, but also that such a structure must be constructed to provide a better arena for the working class and its allies to fight within.

What does this mean? It means that for the PCI the development of a class democratic attitude to state structures is essential not only as a propaganda exercise but as a realistic approach *to running sections of the state*. Even if that state is still within a capitalist society, as in, for example Bologna, the structures of the state can provide a set of experiences for the mass of working people that acts as a springboard for socialism. Thus, the restructuring of the Bolognese local authority has been carried out to ensure, primarily, mass popular involvement through a set of neighbourhood councils. But democracy only starts there, throughout the state services in the city there has been the devolution of power to localities and to consumers of services. Thus in Bologna, on a day-to-day basis, the state provides working people with a set of democratic experiences of their locality *and* of their state.

Let me underline this point. In the previous section of the article I have claimed that monopoly capital with social democratic agreement, has shifted the whole state structure in its direction, leaving us with a terrain of class struggle that is now much more difficult to articulate with class struggle. What I am suggesting the PCI has done is shifted their state structures the other way. Whilst neither of these shifts by themselves guarantees the victory of one class over another they do influence that class struggle enormously. Whilst it is true to reiterate that there is a massive set of class struggles going on *outside* of the state and that these can recoup any losses caused by state structures, it does make the struggle more difficult. In Great Britain more difficult for the working class; in Bologna for the monopoly capitalists.

The use of the Italian example is not to underline *our* backwardness, but rather to provide a clear analogy of another capitalist country. It is not at all necessary that we should simply follow this analogy but I think it is one that should inform our political practice. In many ways we are in a situation that puts us further forward than our comrades in Italy. Social democracy has provided a contradictory experience not only for the British working class but also for monopoly capital.

For whilst it is true that the Bolognese working class have a local state structure that can more clearly articulate their interests, the size of public expenditure in, for example, Coventry is much greater. The social wage in that city experienced by the working class is actually quite high; social democracy has taught the class that the state will "look after them" and to some extent the local state does fulfil a part of that pledge. However it does so in structures that provide little real experience of democracy for working people; structures that *do* provide real opportunity for control by monopoly capital.

For the element of social democracy that is decidedly anti-revolutionary is the one that tells the working class that the state will look after its interests *without* day-to-day involvement, *without* day-to-day struggle. Indeed I would contend that such a strategy has over the last 20 years undermined the working class and de-politicised them in their millions, a lack of political movement that has directly allowed the mass swing to the right that put Thatcher in to occur. The movement against social democracy has come from working people who do not actually experience it as at all democratic.

What kind of state structures?

The *British Road to Socialism* stands against this conception of the articulation of class struggle and state structures, but we have not yet worked through what this means for our politics with regard to state structures. The Communist Party needs to work out clearly in a mass of areas what sort of state structure we should be struggling for.

This is not to work out what is simply the most "rational" or the most socialist form of structure. Rather it is to struggle for structures that have as their prime objective the construction of a better and more open relationship between the working class and its organisations and the state. What does this mean in practice? Let us look at one of the major planks of Party policy that many of us fought the election over, the six month price freeze. This represents a part of our alternative economic programme; one of the few ways out of the economic crisis that is not anti-working class. Yet even given this centrality we are in a very primitive position in explaining how such a freeze would be implemented. What are the state structures that we believe should be created to carry this out? The working class have had experience of Prices Boards, of Ministers of Prices, etc., and they have also experienced the continuation of inflation. They cannot understand *how* prices would be frozen and it is this that is the vital political question that we fail to answer. As I understand it at the moment, we are arguing for a law to go through the House of Commons freezing prices and that this law would be implemented by a series of courts and inspectors. These would be centrally appointed and centrally inspected from Whitehall. Such a structure replicates the orthodox way in which reforms have occurred within British capitalism; the Factory Inspectorate; Equal Opportunity Commission, etc. All these things have been

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struggled for; they have all been "won". But then all these victories seem to fail to achieve what the class was struggling for. I would say this is primarily because the structures within which the policies are carried out are not ones based upon popular democratic participation.

Let us return to the prices question and set it in the context of locality. Of course we would need a central law and organisation but the actual implementation might take place in the most local form of that state. The role of the Price Inspectorate would not be simply to implement the law but their major role would be to get the mass of the population to implement it. They would spend their time in meetings of community associations, trade unions, old peoples groups, etc., getting the people themselves to ensure that the prices policy was implemented; these mass of people would then flood information to the courts and the inspectorate and thus the policy would have *mass* effectiveness.

Such a state form is much less simple; rests totally upon the movement of masses of working people to implement the policy; depends upon the "professional" to service a whole range of other groups rather than to simply implement the freeze. But what it does do is *involve* people in the policy and therefore any attempt by a Conservative government to remove the prices policy would meet with mass popular resistance not just the anguish of a few Whitehall-based civil servants. Equally with such a structure the pressure from monopoly capital on the prices policy could be much more easily resisted.

The alternative of a Whitehall-run policy provides monopoly capital with its best chance to influence policy as we have seen time and again with prices policy to date. Whitehall and the civil service do provide the most favourable terrain imaginable for that class; the only area that is slightly more on their side is the High Courts. But it is to a combination of these institutions that we are continually consigning our policy victories. Obviously such a structure is to the disadvantage of the working class; in that case when we put forward a *policy* let us also underline it with a *structure* that will ensure its full class implementation.

What does this mean for the politics of the local state?

The history of social democratic reform of the state has taught us, I believe, that by and large the centralisation of the implementation of state policy provides an arena where the working class finds it difficult to discover a full and active role. This has had two effects. Firstly the specific *content* of reforms cannot be defended by the working class when they come under attack since those reforms are extremely distant from the lives of working people. Secondly, all the reforms so far implemented have failed to provide any continuing democratic experience for working people; experiences that will assist them in seeing their full role as a future ruling class.

However, whilst one of the aims of this article has been to highlight the class politics of state *structures* and how progressive forces need detailed plans for those structures, I have also wanted to stress the importance of locality as a progressive part of those structures. Simply put, monopoly capital has attempted to move as much democratic power away from locality because it is in the sphere of locality that the working class as a class has some possibility of a mass politics. Politics around the local branches of the state and around the local area are intelligible to working people both as a target and in terms of having a real effect. Consequently socialists must not only put effort in building up and working with such local politics, they must also have a clear understanding of the democratic possibilities of all aspects of the state in the locality. We must use these democratic possibilities but we must have detailed plans for extending and strengthening them in localities. It is not enough to be simply in favour of community politics in the way the Liberal Party is; we must relate that to specifically class structures in the state around a class politics of the state. Yet equally it is not enough to operate in terms of class politics at a national level; it is in localities that people live; it is in localities that any real mass movement will be built up; it is in localities that any real participatory democratic working class intrusion into the capitalist state will be made.

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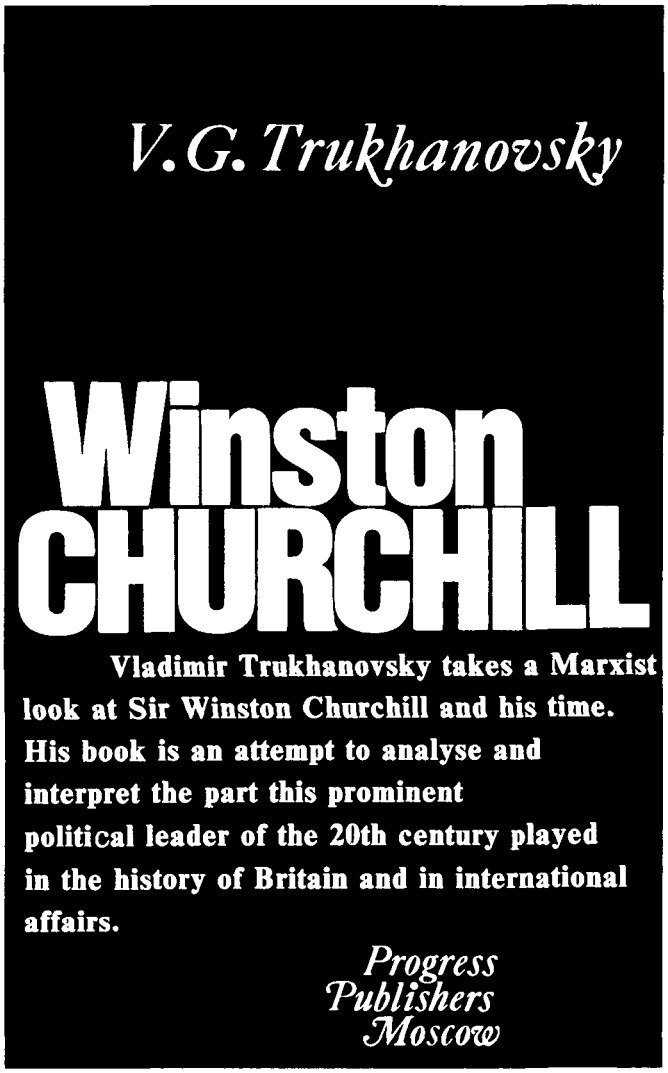
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Intellectuals and the Labour Movement

Eric Hobsbawm

In this article[1] I shall try to do three things. First, I shall have to explain the way I use the term intellectual, second I shall discuss the political role of intellectuals in the past few years, and lastly I shall say something about the tasks of marxist intellectuals, as I see them. But all my article assumes something that is new in the developed capitalist world, namely the existence of a large body of intellectuals, possibly a majority, who are profoundly critical of capitalist society. One of the symptoms of the profound and dramatic changes in this society, which preceded its present crisis, was the appearance of such a mass of radically dissenting intellectuals in and around the universities in the 1960s. This phenomenon may or may not be permanent, and it is not without precedent; for instance during the birth-crisis of industrial capitalism between 1830 and 1848. And, of course, in the marginal countries of capitalism and the underdeveloped world it is familiar. In the developed capitalist countries, where between 1848 and the 1930s most student movements were on the political right, if they existed at all, it is new, though a certain minor shift to the left occurred during the last great phase of capitalist crisis in the 1930s and during the war.

Let me now turn to my first theme, which is a necessary preliminary clarification of terms. What are "the intellectuals"?

I accept, first, Gramsci's suggestion that every society and social group requires certain specialised functions to be carried out, ranging from the technical to what may be broadly called the ideological, and that the people who carry them out are intellectuals. This does not mean (and I am not sure how far Gramsci wants it to mean) that these intellectuals, sometimes quite a small body, *necessarily* form a group or stratum which is distinct from the class or group that has given rise to them, let alone a group with specific social interests across other social dividing lines as a stratum of intellectuals. Sometimes they plainly do not. For instance, officers who carry out the function of intellectuals in armies, e.g., on the general staff or as instructors in military academies, are much less distinct from other officers than from other intellectuals. These, if I understand Gramsci correctly, are what he calls "organic intellectuals". However, if these functions require a numerically large body of people to carry them out, it is of course likely that this body will develop corporate interests, a corporate identity, etc., especially if its functions are technically rather specialised. For instance, corporation and tax lawyers are undoubtedly organic intellectuals of capitalism, but as practitioners of a rather esoteric discipline, they have something in common as lawyers as well as servants of business.

Special Training

Second, however, Gramsci observes that past societies have produced bodies of intellectuals which persist, and whose functions are in varying degrees adaptable for the purposes of new classes and societies. These are what he calls the "traditional intellectuals"—for instance the clergy or the university teachers. But I would go rather further and suggest that this persistence of "traditional" intellectuals expressed not only the combined and uneven development of history, but also the fact that the function of intellectuals is almost always linked to the possession of particular skills which can normally only be acquired by special training in special institutions, i.e., in schools. In generally illiterate societies these skills begin with the easy command of reading and above all writing ("clerks") and even today in many parts of Africa this is still so. Intellectuals are drawn from those attending at least secondary school. In literate societies the situation is more complex, but attendance at some form of higher education is still the easiest way to become eligible for membership of the intellectuals. And the quickest way of defining intellectuals is as people who have successfully undergone the required level of schooling. But this, of course, applies to most "organic" intellectuals as well as to "traditional" ones, and provides common ground for both. They have been ground down between the same sort of millstones.

But there is a third point. With some exceptions the bulk of what I would call "organic" intellectuals carry out specific technical functions for their class or in the society dominated by their class, and therefore undergo specific, sometimes highly vocational training for them—for instance as accountants, as technologists or whatever. This may incidentally give them strong corporate interests, and if—as is

[1]The article is based on the talk to the opening plenary of last year's CUL.

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usual today—they are mainly employed for a wage or salary, interests in common with other wage-earners, e.g., as potential trade unionists. On the other hand I suggest that it also tends to identify many or most of them more easily with the class whose organic intellectuals they are, as with doctors, engineers or technocrats in firmly bourgeois societies. In fact, in such societies groups of this kind may not consider themselves to be intellectuals at all or be considered intellectuals, but simply members of the class into which they are socially and economically integrated, and from which many of them may be recruited. Thus the traditional bourgeois definition of an intellectual abstracts completely from his or her functional activity or social situation. An engineer in himself, or a banker or even a publisher are called "intellectuals" only if they happen to like reading hard books or going to concerts of classical music.

Conversely, people who normally were and are called intellectuals and see themselves as such, were and are mainly drawn from among those persons who hold jobs for which the qualification is one which does not teach them anything about holding specific jobs, or who are in the process of being taught general but non-vocational intellectual skills and knowledge. This situation may or may not make them socially somewhat marginal; but we ought to recall that in imperial China learning about the ancient classics was a way to become rich and a member of the ruling class, and in modern France learning some fairly abstruse higher mathematics at the *Polytechnic* will do the same for a man and even, today, for a few women. The accumulation of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" is increasingly hard to separate from that of economic capital.

Their Sheer Size

Here, once again, Gramsci's distinction between "traditional" and "organic" intellectuals seems to me to be less clear or important than he thought. On the other hand I rather think that the social origin and the form of training of intellectuals are highly relevant. It is important to know whether a person or group belongs to the first generation to have received a higher education or not; whether he or she passes through an established set of educational institutions or a new or transformed one; whether he or she belongs to the, now diminishing, group of the individually or collectively self-educated; and so on.

But whatever the nature of intellectuals, one point about them is of considerable practical importance, namely their sheer size as a social group. Let me say very rapidly and approximately, that in the past their numbers were relatively and often absolutely small, that they are today vastly larger and that the relative or absolute growth probably still continues. I leave you to consider the reasons for this. Let me simply point out, by way of illustration, that the proportion of students in West Germany in the 1970s was, relative to the total population, about thirty times greater than in the Germany of the 1870s. Now quite small groups of intellectuals can, as we shall see, play a very significant part in the politics of their countries, but we are today dealing, in Britain as elsewhere, with a very substantial mass of people, though not necessarily a homogeneous one.

Workers and Intellectuals

So much for what intellectuals are. But I want to make a third initial distinction—namely between the types of participation of intellectuals in the movements of other classes. Broadly speaking in the developing bourgeois countries of the west, which also happen to have been mainly countries of legal mass politics, intellectuals have tended to attach themselves to wider political and social movements such as the labour movement, but in the less developed or underdeveloped countries, which have also often lacked bourgeois democracy or political legality, they largely took the place of such movements, though they usually claimed only to keep the place warm until the workers themselves went into action. There are also intermediate cases such as Italy and parts of the Habsburg Empire which I merely mention in passing. Thus, to take two extreme cases, the British Labour and Communist parties grew up as basically proletarian bodies with a small number of intellectuals attached, while the social democratic party or parties of Tsarist Russia were overwhelmingly composed of intellectuals who claimed to—and actually did—represent the workers. It does not follow that every group of marxist intellectuals does.

At this point the question of the relation between workers and intellectuals within such movements becomes relevant. Broadly speaking, the more developed the class organisation of the manual workers, the greater what the French call its *ouvrierisme*, i.e. its suspicion of people who are not manual workers—subject to some extent, to the strength of the movement's socialist ideology, which makes workers willing to accept anyone identified with the movement, irrespective of class origin or profession. An obvious example are the most purely proletarian organisations, the unions. In the major western industrial countries, Britain, the USA, Germany and France, it is probably still inconceivable that a man of non-working class origin could become the leader of a major union of manual workers, but this is not so in underdeveloped or semi-developed countries. Indeed, even today in Italy the general secretary of the metalworkers is

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an intellectual. Roughly speaking, the more backward and underdeveloped the country and its labour movement, the more outsiders are welcomed as leaders and interlocutors, and indeed often their status as intellectuals—e.g. as lawyers or professors—used to be an actual asset. How far this distinction remains valid is another question.

The Last Decade

So much for clarification and definitions. Now let me turn to the present, that is to say, broadly speaking, the past ten or twelve years. One thing is fairly obvious about this period. During the past few years and especially since 1968, groups of intellectuals have played an unusually prominent and important part in the political and social movements of their nations. This applies to the developed capitalist countries, the socialist countries and the third world, if you will excuse my using that familiar but unsatisfactory term. This applies not only to students as a body, though theirs is the most spectacular example. I am thinking here of the role of students in 1968-70 in France, Italy, West Germany, the USA, Poland, Yugoslavia, Brazil and Mexico—I daresay there are more examples—and in the 1970s in Thailand, Turkey and Iran. Their action has set off massive working class movements, initiated the overthrow of governments or produced major responses from governments; including, of course, severe repression. However other and smaller bodies of intellectuals have also played an important and often dramatic part—for instance in Czechoslovakia, both during 1968 and since—I am thinking of Charter 77—in Poland, in the resistance to military regimes in Brazil and Greece and to Mrs. Gandhi's state of emergency in India.

Now this role derives largely from the three major assets of intellectuals as a group, even as a relatively not very numerous group. They are articulate and have access to media of communication, within the limits of what is permitted at home, more freely abroad. They possess built-in networks of communication even in very unfavourable conditions. And through schools and universities they have ready-made institutions for getting together and acting collectively, many of these being situated in capital cities or other places where action is easily noticed. In short, they can act politically when nobody else can, outside the actual power-structure. This is naturally of the greatest importance in countries where political action from below is restricted or prohibited. There they may be the *only* independent fora for political expression. Unfortunately there are quite a lot of such countries in the world today, though fortunately in a good many of them the minimum of expression is allowed, or no longer effectively prevented, without which nothing would be possible. That is why there are dissidents in the USSR. However, as the example of France, Italy and West Germany in 1968-69 shows, even in bourgeois-democratic countries intellectuals—in the form of student movements—have used their assets to break through the crust which had hardened over their countries' politics and made possible the release of forces which had built up below it—including in the working class.

Their Strength—and Weakness

The enormous strength of intellectuals therefore has been their capacity to start things off in situations when nobody else could have done so, outside the power structure. On the other hand their prominence has been due not to their own force as a social group—which I shall say something about later—but to situations which, for one reason or another, made it difficult or impossible for anyone else to take such an initiative. And—this is of crucial importance—unless others take up the lead of the intellectuals, or respond to it in some way, their independent movements are almost certainly too weak to get very far on their own. Students can start revolutions but not make them. Of course their movements may make a lot of difference to matters of specific corporate concern to intellectuals such as university reform, but that is not what I am talking about at the moment. That is the essential weakness of their position.

Yet we ought not to stress the evident weakness of intellectuals' movements in isolation without also underlining the limitations of the movements of the labouring classes without the intellectuals. This was recognised long ago by both Kautsky and Lenin, and Lenin's distinction between the purely "trade-unionist" class consciousness which, he argued, was all that the workers would develop by themselves, and the "socialist consciousness" which would be brought into their movement from outside, is familiar. One could argue about this as a historical generalisation, but, as always when Lenin talks about concrete political practice, he puts his finger on a genuine problem. In countries with legal mass political organisation, the danger of mass parties and trade unions drifting into limited corporative actions or short-term tactical operations, and losing sight of the longer-term objectives and strategy, is real. In countries without such political legality, or with young and inexperienced movements of the labouring classes, the task of creating effective national political or class mobilisations, may be difficult or impossible without outside initiative and participation. If intellectuals alone cannot get far, workers and peasants also need intellectuals. And this, I suggest, applies not only in third-world countries but also, in rather different ways, in developed ones.

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Growing Prominence

Now the second thing that is fairly obvious about intellectuals in recent years is that, in the developed countries, they have become far more prominent within the labour, socialist and communist movements than before. The typical Labour candidate between the wars was a miner or railwayman, but today he or she is much more likely to be someone described as a "lecturer". This impression is confirmed by a look at the *active* membership of most divisional Labour Parties. On the continent it is even more obvious among social-democratic parties, especially where some of them have virtually died out in their old proletarian-based form and been replaced, as in France or Spain, by what has been perceptively called "Euro-socialist" parties. Without going into the evidence, I think this also applies in many communist parties, in spite of the fact that these are the parties which have tried most systematically and consistently to bring forward working-class cadres. And as for the ultra-left or new left, it is quite evident that the great bulk of the activists in this collection of groups and organisations are not manual workers, however proletarian the labels they tie on themselves.

And yet this increasing participation of intellectuals in such movements cannot be welcomed without some very serious qualifications. For it represents two phenomena, both of which risk widening the gap between workers and intellectuals, or at least which conceal potential divergences between them. On the one hand we have a multiplication of left wing or even marxist intellectuals; on the other, and more dangerously, we have a *simultaneous* relative decline in the manual workers' participation in labour movements—except in the actual trade unions of manual workers, which form a declining proportion of the total. This decline is due both to the relative decline of old fashioned manual labour in the modern economy and also, at the level of cadres, to some extent to an actual transfer of potential cadres from workers to intellectuals through the main mechanism of social mobility, namely the educational process. In one way this has been politically positive. Between, say, 1870 and 1939 the classic road of social mobility out of the manual working class led partly to professions like school-teaching and lower office jobs in the public sector, which did not cut people off entirely from working class ways and the labour movement—especially in the old industrial areas—but largely to white-collar jobs in the private sector—e.g., as clerks—which tended to turn them into Tories or even potential supporters of fascism. The mass transfer to various kinds of mainly subaltern intellectual occupations has been much more likely to lead them to, or keep them on, the left. Yet there is a major difference between an able working class boy or girl who stays on the shop floor and the same person who becomes a socialist militant as a social worker or polytechnic lecturer, and those young workers who never make it to A or O levels are keenly aware of this difference. Students or ex-students are not the same as workers, even when they think they are or ought to be.

Danger of the Ghetto

But even when they wish to identify most passionately with the cause of the workers, the very fact that intellectuals are today a rather numerous body, both as a social stratum and as a sector of the left, creates the danger of divergence. There is the danger of a barely concealed contempt for the workers who do not happen to agree with revolutionary intellectuals. This has been rather noticeable on the new left of the USA or West Germany. There is the danger of establishing a sort of large social and intellectual ghetto in which intellectuals, while claiming to operate within the working class movement, actually address each other, often in terms which are actually incomprehensible to anyone outside. This is not a danger confined to Marxists, but to any literate group sufficiently large to develop esoteric interests and an esoteric jargon, especially when both are reinforced by such institutions as colleges. Poets write poems about the act of writing poems—i.e., addressed to other poets—and if there aren't enough of them, teachers make students read and discuss them, or read critics who discuss them (and who may also be both poets and teachers) in order to pass examinations. Much the same is, unfortunately, true of a lot of marxist philosophers. And in political practice, groups of left wing intellectuals who isolate themselves from the actual political labour movement, on the grounds that it is far too moderate for them, risk the unhappy fate of the post-1968 ultra-left: disillusion, fragmentation and marginalisation. I do not wish to underestimate the genuine if modest successes achieved by certain marxist organisations in the past ten years—and still less, of course, their dynamism and initiative. But by the standards of their own original hopes and their own evaluation of their tasks, they have nevertheless been disappointing.

Intellectuals as a Social Stratum

This brings me to the third aspect of intellectuals in politics today: the movement of intellectuals as a social stratum. Unlike the first two aspects, namely the new role of intellectuals as potential spark-plugs in world politics and their increasing prominence in the socialist and communist movements, or movements bearing such labels, this is not at all obvious. The only obvious facts are that there is today a large and growing mass of people in society who carry out the functions of intellectuals, that almost all of

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them have passed through the medium and higher parts of the educational system, and that this system is of increasing size and social significance, since it provides a crucial, and perhaps today the central, mechanism for social differentiation and selects a large, and perhaps in modern state-monopoly capitalist societies the crucial, sector of the superior cadres. But it does not follow that all those who have passed through this educational mill—even those who have passed through the general and non-vocational parts of it—form a single social stratum, though they may well all bear the signs of their common provenance.

In fact, intellectuals are both divided horizontally and stratified vertically; as well as being, in many cases, associated with specific classes. There is, first, a large and growing stratum of people in production who require some sort of systematic academic training to do their jobs instead of or in addition to apprenticeship, training on the job and experience. The growing role of the educational system for socio-professional selection underlines this. This has long been so for the intellectual professions of the bourgeoisie, including those directly linked with production such as engineers, but today many people who would, fifty years ago, have been formed as skilled workers are formed as and become something like subordinate technical intellectuals. There is, second, the even more enormous growth of tertiary occupations of an intellectual kind—for instance in education, communications and the media, various kinds of social service and some parts of the swelling administrative bureaucracy, and the equally expanding fields of planning and research. Part of this could be classified under direct production, given the role of science today, but I am not here concerned with drawing precise demarcation lines. There is, third, the large number of people who have undergone the basic training as intellectuals but can't find employment in them, either because the capitalist machine overproduces intellectuals or because the economic crisis of capitalism does not provide enough jobs for them.

All these are intellectuals of one kind or another, but there is also a stratification among them, and insofar as capitalism finds it increasingly difficult to provide room at the top or promotion, this stratification becomes more noticeable even in nominally open professions. As in the medieval catholic clergy —which of course formed the bulk of the feudal intelligentsia—there is a marked difference between the modern equivalents of parish priests and of bishops and cardinals, between poor friars and monks of opulent monasteries. During such crises as the Reformation and the French Revolution this difference emerged in political and ideological terms. It would be a mistake to underestimate the gap between "high" and "low" intellectuals today. However this is not simply a stratification within a particular class such as the old labour aristocracy, for certain kinds of intellectuals are integrated into or identified with the ruling class in a way in which labour aristocrats were not and could not be. This is due not only to the increasing importance of technocratic training for business, but to the use of meritocracy in providing a legitimation for privilege. As Bourdieu and de Saint Martin note at the conclusion of their analysis of 216 major French firms and their heads in 1972 (Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales Mar-Apl 1978 20/1)

> "few dominant groups have ever assembled as many principles of legitimation (notably aristocracy of birth, economic success and meritocracy based on success in school) as the present occupants of the positions of power (in France)." (p.112)

Since becoming an intellectual marks a much sharper separation from manual labour, the link between certain types of intellectuals and workers is less intimate, though there are activities—primary school teaching and perhaps mass circulation journalism in the past, possibly social work today—which are more closely associated with them.

Finally, there are differences between intellectuals in social origin and selection. The elite strata are both largely selected from the established middle class, especially what the Germans call the *Bildungsbürgertum*—those who owe their social position precisely to their parents' accumulation of cultural capital—and also often trained in separate elite institutions. Conversely, the bulk of the first-generation who are the product of the educational expansion since the 1950s tend to come largely, at least the men, from below the established middle class. They are also, on average, much younger, since they have only some twenty years of recruitment to draw upon.

Political Orientation

In spite of this heterogeneity, there is substantial common ground ideologically, politically and culturally between a great many of these intellectual groups, with the major exception of the vocationally trained or technocratic intellectuals who largely identify with the bourgeoisie. But of course they are the ones who do not see themselves or are seen as intellectuals. By tradition most of the rest have always stood left of centre in the developed capitalist countries though there have been some notable exceptions such as Germany. In Britain they used to be Liberal and are now largely a sort of Labour, in America Democrats, in France Republicans. To the extent that in such countries these broad left-of-centre alignments have tended also to include

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the working class, at least periodically, a sort of alliance between workers and intellectuals goes back a long way. And it is also a fact that a certain continuum stretches from, say, the ideal *Guardian*-reader in Britain leftwards towards the radical revolutionaries; as witness the genuine moral anguish of West German and more recently Italian liberal intellectuals in bringing themselves to the point of openly condemning and opposing leftwing terrorist groups. Let me ask you whether the general attitude of the left-of-centre intelligentsia towards the student explosions of the late 1960s would have been initially as tolerant and sympathetic if these movements had not waved some sort of red flag but instead a swastika banner (as in Weimar Germany)? I doubt it. And quite right too. And yet this wide if vague inclination to the left conceals substantial divergences between what one might call the conciliated and reformist and the unreconciled and revolutionary groups or strata of intellectuals. Anyone who has lived through a major upheaval in a university will confirm this.

Now it might be possible to identify each group with a particular socio-economic stratum, and this has often been done: for instance revolutionary intellectuals have been long identified (mainly by bourgeois writers) with strata of marginalised or "alienated" intellectuals, i.e. mainly with the mass of those who cannot find jobs at the level which, as intellectuals, they expect. There is obviously something in this, though it patently tells us little about the selection of the intellectual cadres of actual Marxist revolutionary movements, which have been overwhelmingly drawn from intellectuals who could easily have done very nicely for themselves in their bourgeois societies. But the main difficulty is, that the revolutionary and the reformist intellectuals are not necessarily separate strata, however specified, but separate stages in the life-cycle.

This is not a function of growing up and maturing, as the folklore of the liberal bourgeoisie held in the days of my own parents. It is due primarily to the fact that the modern state and public sector, the modern media-saturated society, perhaps even the private sector, recruit their increasingly numerous cadres precisely through the educational system. As it so happens, the Establishments are today worried because, probably for the first time for more than a century, the institutions of higher education—or at least their humanities and social science parts—have acted as incubators of a genuine though often woolly mass ideology of radical dissent. Hence the counter-attack of generally ageing reactionaries who ascribe this to some sort of communist conspiracy rather than to the crisis of capitalism, which it reflects. And of course this state of affairs is troublesome, and in times of crisis and breakdown for the system—such as we may be moving into in this country—may be dangerous, so long as the radical intellectuals cannot be kept safely apart from the remainder of the popular movement, as might be in some university ghetto in which they are lost among the labyrinthine mazes of student or sectarian politics or pursue theological disputes about doctrine.

However, so long as the situation is reasonably stable, even intellectuals given to radical dissent can be integrated, though naturally most governments and ruling classes would prefer them to emerge from their studies hard-working, patriotic and devoted to proving how much better the social system is than all alternatives, though naturally capable of moderate progress and improvement. For the system needs them and the rewards of accumulating what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" are quite substantial, and available to a good many. In France even the university drop-outs of the middle 1970s had much better job prospects than other young people and were "getting the pick of all except the very top jobs". (*New Society*, 6.7.78 p. 19-20). Let me also remind you that there is at least one bourgeois regime which recruits virtually the entire top cadre of the state (as distinct from the private sector of the economy) from among revolutionary or barely ex-revolutionary graduates, namely Mexico.

Necessary Concessions

It is true that the intellectuals thus integrated require certain concessions, but these are in fact the conditions which bourgeois-democratic regimes normally provide for most of their middle classes, and even some non-democratic bourgeois regimes—except at moments of acute crisis—often allow for: some freedom to speak, read and write, to travel, to engage in political and pressure-group activities, or just to grumble in public. Conversely, the demand for and the defence of these conditions binds large sectors of the established intellectual and professional strata to bourgeois-democratic capitalism, however critical they may be of it in other respects. And insofar as they see the threat to these conditions as coming not only from the right but from some parts of the left, their traditional links with the left, both domestically and internationally, may be eroded. If we were to look for a political platform which unites such intellectuals across the continents and social systems, it would probably today be this: and it would unite them against both the Chilean and the Czechoslovak regimes, the Cambodian as well as the Brazilian, as well as—with varying degrees of hesitation and regret—against some of their own left. I happen to approve of this platform. These demands for freedom and democracy are not confined to intellectuals or relevant to them; and they ought to be an integral part of socialism; and

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for all classes. Nevertheless, they are also demands in which the professional middle classes have a specific interest, and are often linked with even more specific concerns of this stratum, such as the question of their children's education and certain cultural activities which they virtually monopolise. Such demands can be, and often are, granted to an elite, while in practice denied to others. And the intellectual middle classes, or large sections of them, are privileged, though their rewards are not always financial. They have a lot more to lose than their chains.

Politically a lot of them tend to be attracted to some sort of a left, not only because there's a tradition of liberalism and the general atmosphere of student life since 1960 has been leftish, but also because they are increasingly today employed for salaries, and largely in some way or another by the public sector. They are, as Dahrendorf rightly says, for equality because they are for equal privilege. They would not change their position significantly in a socialist society, so long as it met their conditions. But then, they are not the only ones who don't relish the prospect of an undemocratic socialism. On the other hand they—we, for I speak of my own stratum—are remote from actual production and indeed largely parasitic on public subsidies for activities whose actual social utility is difficult to measure. The unestablished sectors of this stratum—the students, the surplus of unemployed intellectuals—are clearly more radical while young or dissatisfied, but paradoxically I would not bet on their commitment to the left being quite so firm. It will remain so only insofar as the mass labour and socialist movement retains its hegemony, and they remain attached to it. It is unfortunately quite easy to envisage many of such radical agitations, though probably not in England which at present pin on a red badge, unpin it and reveal themselves as, say, ultra-nationalists, difficult to distinguish from those which once used to pin on rightwing badges. I hope not.

Summary

Only three things seem fairly clear. First, as I have said, that they are today, to an unusual extent, political initiators and catalysts. Second, that the political future depends on the union of intellectuals and the masses—but also, unfortunately, that there is often a major risk of isolating themselves from, even of antagonising, their necessary allies; if only by expressing their separateness in a separatist jargon. Third, and more positively, that their movement has in the past two decades produced a greater number of Marxist intellectuals than ever before in the west. They will play an important role in the future. And to their tasks I now turn in my final observations.

The Role of Marxist Intellectuals

Marxist intellectuals recognise that they have to combine theory and practice in both their theoretical and practical activities. That is to say as practitioners our strategy and tactics rest on a Marxist analysis of the situation and as theorists our theory is rooted in the study of the concrete reality of society, which cannot be grasped purely in the abstract, but only through human praxis. We are no doubt involved in various ways and different degrees in the labour movement and the class struggle, but we also have a specific function in the socialist and communist movement as intellectuals, namely in the field of Marxist analysis. We are by no means the only ones to have this function and still less can we claim a monopoly of it. And yet there is a certain social division of labour, and whether or not as individuals we are better qualified to do so, as intellectuals we have more time to spend on reading and writing than others, if only because it fits in with our training and jobs. And there was sound political sense in the old party slogan which guided us in the 1930s, namely that the first task of the communist student was to be a good student.

Now our contribution in the field of marxist analysis and theory must today be determined by the fact that we are living not only through an impressive efflorescence, but through a profound crisis of Marxist thinking. This has three practical aspects. First, the marxist analysis of present-day capitalism, however valid in general principle, is in concrete terms largely out-of-date. And there has been much less work in this field than is necessary. Second, our analysis of socialism, never very well developed, has largely broken down. And third, our view of the actual forces which will bring about the transition from capitalism to socialism and the strategy and tactics for doing so, requires very fundamental reconsideration especially in view of the changes in modern capitalist society. These three aspects of the crisis are naturally interconnected.

The point I want to stress is not the need to bring the Marxist analysis up-to-date, which includes deciding what has become obsolete in old and sometimes deeply established doctrines, but the way in which this ought to be done. I don't want to stress the need for looking again at our analysis, not just because a lot of people recognise it anyway, but also because we all know that, ever since Engels in 1895 explained why the future revolution couldn't any longer use 1848 as a model, the major communist figures have all revised earlier marxist analysis. It is true that a major obstacle to the development of marxist thinking is still far from extinct, namely the tendency, for which there are historical reasons, to transform it into a rigid set of dogmas and doctrines incorporated in a body of texts untouchable—

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except by authority. However, I am happy to think that this obstacle is probably smaller in many Communist parties outside the socialist states than there, or among many Marxist sects and organisations in the capitalist and third worlds.

How to Rethink Marxism

The problem, then, is not whether to rethink marxism but how to. Now there is today an enormous proliferation of writings which, while claiming to be Marxist, throw out the baby with the bathwater—of people who lend Marx's name to some current intellectual fashion or guru, of people who claim to be Marxist but reject Marx' Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* or think historical analysis is irrelevant to politics, and so on. I am thinking even more of the enormous growth of marxist metaphysics; of the sort of philosophers, sociologists and economists whose writings neither interpret the world nor help to change it, but are aimed chiefly to produce discussion in seminars of other Marxist philosophers, sociologists and economists. My criticism is naturally not aimed at all current marxist theorising; and I do not wish to deny that much of the writing I criticise is very acute and some is interesting. Nor do I wish to imply—let me say so clearly—that there is only one "correct" interpretation of Marxism, though I think it needs saying that much of what goes under the name of Marxism today would have amazed the old man himself. I simply wish to point out that this sort of abstract Marxist theorising can have serious political consequences. For to divorce marxist theory from the actual *concrete* social reality and its transformations is to divorce theory from political practice and to leave political practice unguided and arbitrary. It enables people whom Marx and Lenin would have easily recognised as, say, anarcho-syndicalists or narodnik terrorists or even Mazzinian petty-bourgeois nationalists, to pin some sort of marxist badge to their lapels and claim that their practice conforms to their badge. I am sufficient of an old-fashioned marxian Marxist to believe that this divorce between an abstract and metaphysical theory and an arbitrary, often ultra-voluntarist, practice is not due just to a wrong interpretation of Marx, but that on the contrary such wrong interpretations are largely due to the social and political isolation of the students and intellectuals among whom they flourish.

The counterpart of this abstraction is a total concentration on what is immediately relevant for agitation. Sometimes both coexist, as among the recent generation of British Marxist historians, some of whom go off at a tangent pursuing Althusserian abstractions while others concentrate on recent labour history; with the incidental result that large sections of British history are left to anti-Marxists—e.g. the English Revolution—and these will in due course write the textbooks for our schools. I believe this search for an immediate "relevance" to be another way of escaping the major task of marxist analysis today. This task is to be found somewhere between the extremes of debating the law of value in general and of writing editorials against the education cuts in the *Morning Star*, though of course both are necessary. It is to stand back and take a look at the world in historical perspective. This is not an academic exercise, though I don't see why Marxist academics should not live up to their name also.

Over the last 25 years we have been living through the most spectacular transformation of human society; much more far-reaching than the first arrival of industrial capitalism because it has been both deeper and more global. It is the realisation of the tendencies of capitalism noted by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*. We have been living through an era when not merely technology and the productive process have been revolutionised—incidentally in ways which have transformed even the remotest households such as the transistor—but when social structure, human relations, culture, have utterly changed. We are now actually living out old predictions: the disappearance of the peasantry, the transformation of the family, the collapse of ancient religions like Roman Catholicism. And with the end of what, looking back, we must recognise as a transitional phase of capitalist development—transitional because it adapted and embodied the heritage of the precapitalist past it was not yet able to destroy—even the structures of traditional capitalist society are in crisis. And with them our analysis of its eventual overthrow and our strategy, based on that earlier period. This affects the capitalists, because they no longer know what is happening and what to do, as witness the helplessness of their economists and the flight of their ideologists into reaction and, as in recent writings of Daniel Bell, into religion. ("The Return of the Sacred", *Bull. Amer.Acad.Arts & Sci.* XXXI Mar 1978, 6 pp 29-55). They may be left to their own problems.

Our Responsibility

But we are not much better off. In the midst of this new phase of capitalism, which took us by surprise, and in the midst of a general crisis of capitalism which some of us predicted without really understanding it, we have no clear or agreed perspective at all about how it can lead to a socialist transformation and, to be honest, no real expectation that it will. And this failure is particularly grave in Britain, since ours, the oldest country of developed capitalism, is the one in which the breakdown of capitalism is in many ways the most dramatic, the need for transformation desperately urgent, and the objective conditions for it better than in most.

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I would not be writing here if I didn't think Marxism provided a better guide to the solution of the problems of our time than other approaches. But it won't do so unless Marxist intellectuals spend more time than many of us have done in analysing concretely what is happening in the world today and the way it is going, even when we don't think it is going our way. There have been enough failures and disappointments for the left since 1960 to suggest that we are groping in semi-darkness. If we are to change the world, we must know what the conditions of our struggle really are, not what they were or ought to be. If we don't find out and act accordingly we, as Marxist intellectuals, will be symptoms of the world crisis but we won't help to overcome it and to build socialism.

Wanted: A New Type of Nationalisation

Billy Benson, Arthur Hodges and Mike Le Cornu

(This article is based on the proceedings of a conference held by the Heathrow Airport branch of the Communist Party last year. The Conference was called to discuss the need for a strategic initiative to democratise the air travel industry, and particularly Heathrow. It was attended by airport workers, both manual and non-manual, Party and non-Party.

Three main contributions were made to the conference—by Arthur Hodges, Billy Benson and Mike Le Cornu. Other contributions to discussion are indicated by a break in the text. The transcript of the conference has been edited by Paul Marginson.)

Introduction

Heathrow is Britain's largest airport. Last year 80 million passengers passed through Heathrow. In addition, considerable quantities of freight were handled. Heathrow employs 52,000 workers, in a diversity of occupations, ranging from skilled aircraft maintenance staff, to baggage and cargo handlers and flight controllers. The airport is run by a public authority, the British Airports Authority. The Civil Aviation Authority controls route franchises and regulates flights. A third publicly owned body, British Airways, also has a major presence at the airport, employing 25,000 workers.

In the run-up to the recent General Election British Airways chairman, Sir Frank McFadzean, suggested that up to 49 per cent of the corporation should be sold to private investors. Responsibility for effectively countering this latest proposal to undermine the public corporations involved in the air travel industry will rest, in the first place, with the workforce involved. In the past similar attacks, whether in the form of the hand-over of routes to private airline operators, or the introduction of private sub-contractors to the airport, have been opposed. This new threat spotlights the need for the involvement of the workforce in all the decisions that affect the industry, as the best means of protecting and advancing publicly owned industry.

British Airways

Arthur Hodges: The economic history of our publicly owned airlines is littered with examples of preferential treatment of private capital by successive governments. Only ten years ago there was the outrage of the BOAC (now merged with BEA to form British Airways) deal with Cunard, handing over freight traffic to the private sector. That was followed by the attempt of General Aviation Services to obtain substantial profits from Heathrow, through the sub-contracting of wide-ranging aviation services. They were driven out by a historic stoppage right across the airport. But most important of all, routes have been "hived off" to the private sector as a result of the Edwards Report. This Report called for more efficiency through competition, an examination of route licensing, privileged assistance to the private sector and the setting up of a second force airline—British Caledonian. Opposition to the hand-over came from a liaison body of trade union representatives in the airport—the Airways Consultative Joint Action Committee—and also from the official trade union negotiating body, the National Joint Council. Nevertheless, the hand-over went ahead and British Caledonian was created. Moreover, when these competitors run into difficulty, the Civil Aviation Authority—the public authority responsible for the route licenses—intervenes and stops British Airways providing the competition the routes were given away for.

The merger to form British Airways took place for the wrong reasons; to get rid of jobs rather than expand the country's public air system. The appoint-

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ment of Frank McFadzean, Chairman of Shell, as British Airways Chairman was, to say the least, schizophrenic. Impossible burdens have been placed on British Airways to fulfil social criteria, provide effective, comprehensive services, show profits proportional to its capital investment—and periodically despatch some of its lucrative areas of operation to competitors!

Other problems confront British Airways. Competition in cut-price fares on the North Atlantic routes is affecting profitability. Scheduled services are being threatened by charter services. A 28 per cent increase in charter traffic is expected over the next two years, compared to a five per cent increase in scheduled services. If the current trend of price cutting continues it has been openly predicted that some airlines will face grave financial difficulties. Beyond a certain point fare reductions are undesirable; adversely affecting factors such as punctuality, business stability, service to the customer and endangering air safety.

The nationalisation of British aerospace provides a clear case for a co-ordinated aircraft development policy gearing the commercial needs of the airline to aircraft design, manufacture and development. The historic failure to do this has resulted in the forthcoming replacement of the prematurely ageing Trident fleet by American built Boeing aircraft. A policy is required which integrates all branches of the air industry. Yet, the position of the government is gradually to diminish, rather than expand, the relative role of the nationalised airway. Our concern has always been that British Airways should adopt policies directed towards expansion, that it should provide secure employment, first-class wages and conditions and offer the public the highest possible standards of safety and efficiency, thereby affording an unparallelled potential for profitability. To do this requires a new policy—a new type of nationalisation.

Nationalisation

Billy Benson: There's hardly a working class organisation, whether it's a political party, a trade union, or a working men's club, that in its constitution, its aims, its policy doesn't say something about public ownership. Why? The reason is that public ownership is one of the pillars on which socialism is built; likewise private ownership is one of the pillars on which capitalism is built. Private ownership not only gives the ruling class their wealth, influence and power but it's also an important factor in the battle for peoples' minds. An acceptance of the idea that people working collectively to create wealth should pass it over to somebody who often has nothing to do with its production is a terrific blow in the ideological battle. The ideological impact of nationalisation has always been very clearly understood by the ruling class. Since 1945 the Tories have never ceased to attack the idea of nationalisation. They have used faults—both genuine or otherwise—in a particular nationalised industry to undermine the whole basis of nationalisation. They've never worried about the grounds on which they attack the nationalised industries. When it loses, it is inefficient, it's too big, its too cumbersome; and when they make a profit, they jump up and say, it's a big monopoly, greedily squeezing money out of people. And let's not kid ourselves, the enemies of nationalisation have been pretty successful. There aren't many people around championing its cause.

As well as combatting the idea of nationalisation at every opportunity the ruling class have worked to utilise the nationalised industries for their own interests. All this chat about the mixed economy, of private capital and public capital working together for the well being of our society, has opened the door to the milking of nationalised industries. The provision of cheap services for private enterprise by the coal, rail, post office and other industries; the carving up of profitable sections of nationalised industries; and of course our old friend sub-contracting, are all means by which the nationalised industries have been milked.

No where, as Arthur has outlined, is this more blatant than in British Airways. Assets, in terms of routes, have been handed over free to private enterprise—an act of piracy. Imagine the great hue and cry that would go up if that happened the other way round. We're not talking about chicken feed either. The handovers to Cunard and to British Caledonian represent something like forty or fifty million pounds per annum lost revenue.

Still On the Defensive

Had it not been for the fight that the trade union and labour movement have put up on routes, on sub-contracting and on other issues, there would be no British Airways as it is today. Think back on all the things that they've tried to do—even to the point of saying: "Well we shouldn't even be maintaining aeroplanes at all. All we should be doing is selling tickets."

But we have always been on the defensive. We have always been protecting the industry, our jobs, our livelihoods. We've never been on the offensive. The input that the organised workers have made has greatly exceeded the output. In other words, for all the tremendous effort that we have made, we are not much further forward that we were over 20 years ago.

. . . There has always been a tendency, and this is a weakness, in the trade union movement to react to a situation. The employer puts forward a proposition and the trade union considers it and tries to

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accommodate it. Only rarely do trade unions initiate something which the employer has to consider. But an example is the job and pay restructure exercise for British Airways' employees in the ground services area. The management outlined a scheme containing joint participation. We rejected the scheme, because whilst the management proposed some form of participation, it was predetermined. No one had been involved in initially working out the scheme. Eventually they re-submitted their proposition for our consideration. We rejected it and put forward our alternatives. At that time we were ahead of management. I'll always remember one day at the Heston training centre. We all had our papers and everything that we'd drawn up, and the management came in and apologised as they hadn't prepared a report. So we said "That's all right, we've got ours—take ours." A wonderful situation.

Going on the Offensive

Billy Benson: How can we go onto the offensive? The key is to have a perspective What is it we're trying to do? What do we want to see? A successful publicly owned civil aviation industry. An industry that gives its workers the very best of wages and conditions: that provides a service to the people that is second to none. Now none of us are so naive as to think that we can bring that about in the set-up as it is now. Impossible! In the set up that exists now we create a lot and then we have to fight for our share of it. We're held back from fighting for all the other things. There's no guarantee if we raise the standard of productivity, or the standard of service and profitability, that the benefit will go to the travelling public and the industry's workers. It's likely to be hived off in all sorts of other directions. This is the problem that holds us back. The answer to it lies in strengthening democracy in the industry. If we don't, then we're for ever going to be falling in between two stools talking about capitalist nationalisation and socialist nationalisation. That's the position we're in and that's the position that for 20 odd years has bedevilled us. And it's not until we grasp the nettle of industrial democracy that we will be able to make progress in this industry of ours.

There are people who would say: "you can't bring about that type of nationalisation in a capitalist society." But in fighting for industrial democracy in a nationalised industry, by raising the question of workers' representatives, and of representatives from the people who are using the services provided by the industry, you are in fact taking part in the struggle to bring about socialism in Britain. Although we don't like the type of nationalised industry we've got, it is a step forward from having none at all. To ignore it and to leave it to be attacked by all its enemies will mean in the end that it will be pushed back. We defended the industry for economic reasons; job security, better wages and conditions, better pensions, shorter working week and so forth.

But we have to take part in defending it politically as well because it's impossible to divide the one from the other. If you're fighting to defend the industry, you're not only fighting to defend jobs and so forth, but you're fighting on the political front as well. In taking the workers into the struggle we're raising their political understanding of the need to fight for these things. Pressing for democracy within the industry will enable us to move from a position of not knowing which way we're going to go, to a position of being absolutely positive about it.

Already we have quite a useful set-up for the introduction of industrial democracy in British Airways in the form of the British Airways Trade Union Council. We haven't won the support of all the unions yet, and there's been a fierce rearguard action from the Board. We need to put our shoulders behind this approach, and press the Board, if necessary through Ministers, to go ahead with the proposals.

Trade Union Autonomy

Industrial democracy is fraught with many problems. How are people going to be elected? Who are they going to be accountable to? How are they going to be removed? How much pay will they get? How do we maintain the independent role of the trade union movement so essential in any form of capitalist society, and, indeed, socialist society?

There are some who back away from these difficult questions. But the workers who are serving on the bodies where decisions are made will have been put there by the trade union movement. We should not get bogged down with the arguments that if we go into industrial democracy you're throwing away your best, biggest shield—your trade union organisation. This shouldn't be the case at all. Trade union representatives should function as they do in negotiations, where they have an equal say with the employers on how it is done. Now that shouldn't affect the role of the trade union movement. Our representatives will be under our control, sending their reports to, and getting their instructions from the people they represent. They won't go sailing off on their own accord. They'll be part of the movement.

Neither are they there for the same purpose as the other people. They are there to make decisions and argue the workers' point of view. And when someone says "How are you going to be able to make unpalatable decisions affecting your members?"—that's easy. We wouldn't be party to unpalatable decisions against our members. We will be arguing for things to be done, and not accepting willy-nilly

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the arguments put forward by people who are there for entirely different reasons.

There's an old adage that you don't go on strike when you're building your own house. Industrial democracy doesn't mean that we would never go on strike. But it would lessen the need for us to take industrial action. We would have an avenue by which we could start to get things put right before they reached the position where strike action or some other action was necessary. We'd have a say in things from the beginning. Take, for example, the five year plan outlined by the management at meetings they held to explain their future programme to the stewards and convenors.

If you can lay down what you're going to do for the next five years by spending millions of pounds buying this aeroplane, and millions of pounds buying that equipment, opening up routes here, there and elsewhere, and closing that route, why can't you plan to benefit the workers? They do it in socialist countries. There's no reason, if we had industrial democracy, why we shouldn't be able to do that as well.

Trade Unions and Broader Struggle

Mike Le Cornu: The question of a new type of nationalisation and industrial democracy must become part of an integrated struggle along with the fight for higher wages and job security. Indeed it is becoming increasingly difficult to advance wages and conditions without intervening in the area of overall policy. Otherwise we will find ourselves, as a trade union movement, confined to fighting to retain the prevailing level of wages, for early retirement and increased redundancy payments.

Those in our movement who see struggle as a narrow criteria for advance would be amply rewarded; because struggle it would be. But to what end and to what purpose? On a tactical and strategical basis we have no option as a movement but to enter the arena for the demand for an alternative policy. We must be to the forefront in our demand for a restructuring of the public sector and for industrial democracy. Embarking along this path requires the mobilisation of the workforce across all grades, sections, areas and various trade unions. It is extremely difficult to win a new policy if every section and every grade is going its own way. Therefore sectional interests must be combined in a joint approach.

Trade Union Development

To understand more clearly the role of the trade unions, it is necessary to look briefly at the historical development of our trade union movement and the role which it has played up to this day. We are all aware that the origin of trade unionism was to unite the workers in a particular establishment to retrieve from the employers a share of the wealth produced. This aim remains just as sharp today as it was then. The record of struggle by the trade union movement against exploitation by employers is unprecedented, but these struggles have remained of a defensive nature within the accepted structure of capitalism. Even with the creation of the Labour Party by the trade unions, there was a failure to recognise the need to end the system which gave rise to the problems that were being faced by the workers. Workers' representatives were placed in Parliament to oppose legislation which could be detrimental to the workers, and initiate legislation which would be of benefit to their members. Trade union demands have been extended with the objective, contained in the majority of trade union rule books, for the involvement of their members in running the establishments in which their members worked. Trade unions have also on their own behalf and through the medium of the TUC, made comments and put forward propositions on government policies, they have participated in various commissions and joint committees such as Bullock on Industrial Democracy. Even the involvement of the trade unions in bringing about the social contract was in a way an attempt to have a say in the redistribution of wealth. But these wider aims were seen to be achievable within the framework of capitalism. We have a proud history in our trade union movement, but nevertheless, whilst they have produced some elements of reform, there has been a failure to raise the level of the workers engaged to the required consciousness of translating struggle into political change.

Sectionalism

Through their executive committees and national conferences—reflecting resolutions from branches—trade unions adopt many progressive policies on international and national issues. But often at local and sectional levels the progressive aims seem to lose their place in the list of priorities. Instead we find trade union areas and sections turning inwards and divisions developing. Trade unions advocate spheres of influence, or proportional representation based on individual trade union membership. Differentials become an overriding issue between craftsmen and non-craftsmen. And whilst of course incomes policies are not the sole cause of our problems, the Labour government's incomes policy has contributed largely to the fact that, particularly at local level, the struggle has been confined to pure, narrow wage demands leading to sectional claims and disputes which because of the lack of perspective for expanding the industry, are by their very nature divisive. Its not a question of abrogating from the struggle on wages, but of raising the struggle to new dimensions.

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The historic struggle over General Aviation Services (GAS) (and sub-contracting in the airport—Ed) was an indication of what can be done. During that period the whole of the workforce was involved. The liaison committee which led the struggle was composed of shop stewards from the engineering services area. No-one ever questioned what trade union a shop steward belonged to; shop stewards were elected on the basis of their capabilities and the recognition of their calibre. There was a unity of purpose, and it was the strength and the involvement of the rank and file in unity which compelled the official trade union body, the National Joint Council, to respond and to reflect the needs and desires of the workforce.

. . . Since then sub-contracting has been brought under control throughout engineering. In every department there is a joint sub-contracting committee. Nothing can be sub-contracted without it going through that committee. There were several instances of people smuggling jobs around the sub-contracting committee. Slowly and surely the net has been tightened, and the last time we had a report from the sub-contracting standing committee it was reported that millions of pounds worth of work had been kept in hand instead of being contracted out.

Industrial Democracy at All Levels

We have got to start from the grassroots and get the membership more aware of what's going on around them. We heard that one steward has some say in the local budget, but I think that's rather unique, isn't it? Why aren't the stewards at the weekly heads of department meetings? Why aren't we more involved with our own budgets and managers' decisions? Because, let's face it, most of these people they call managers are complete yo-yo's; they can't do the job. They rely on the stewards to advise them. We need to be at that type of meeting, which affects the shop floor membership directly, as well as at the Board level.

Industrial democracy on the board is something that's rather far away. We've got to take the bull by the horns, and discuss with our lads at shop floor level how we think that we can improve efficiency, change procedures and what there is in it for the workers involved, and then project that to management. In that way it has come from the floor rather than us reacting to something that's come from management which we've got to report back to the floor. If we can do that then we're beginning to give the lads at shop floor level involvement in their future and in the future of the industry.

We have to avoid the situation where you get stewards who are full-time away from the job. In the last two years some stewards have spent several days a week away from their jobs, on these feasibility studies. It hasn't happened here, but elsewhere leading stewards have got so bogged down in feasibility studies that in the end they became so isolated from the workers that management has been able to appeal to the shopfloor over the heads of the stewards. Here stewards were expected to take unpalatable decisions back to the membership arising from the feasibility studies. But in the end the whole thing broke down, because nobody was willing to sell it to the membership. We need to analyse the problems of communication between the workshop floor and the trade union representatives, which over this past period have left a lot to be desired.

Communication

We're all aware that there's been a newspaper set up in the airport, called *Civil Air Transport News*, attempting to provide an alternative to the existing employer oriented papers. It can do a marvellous job in the battle of ideas. But it can only do that if the workforce contributes to it. At the moment everything is fine, but one thing—contributors. We have a perspective and we should use this organ to put it over.

Years ago we used to use the panel[1] minutes as our main communication base. Today it's rare to see a copy of the panel minutes put up on the notice board. There is a reluctance for some reason or another to explain what it is that the trade unions and their representatives are doing. In many respects these are vital communications, because unless that information is displayed amongst the workers there is a tendency to believe that there's no difference between you and the manager.

We need to look at this whole question of communication. Above all, and far better than the panel minutes, is the report back to the membership. Even if you achieve nothing, go and explain what you've attempted to do. But keep them involved and make them feel that this industry is theirs: that by putting their hand up on an issue they can decide on things which are going to substantially affect their future. Because there is nothing so pleasant as to sit in a shop meeting and vote on a proposition that on the following day is fulfilled. That's participation, and *that's* what industrial democracy means. We have the wherewithal to be able to do it.

Conclusion

Billy Benson: Looking back over the past twenty odd years, two major crises can be pointed to

[1] The panel is the negotiating body at both national and sectional level. Representation on the panel is on both a union and a geographical basis. The latter facilitates the participation of shop stewards in the official negotiating machinery.

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caused by events beyond our control. The first was the publication of the Edwards report: referred to earlier which led to the hand over of routes by the private sector.

The second was the sudden appearance of General Aviation Services on the apron. On both occasions the Communist Party—the Airport Branch—took the initiative in generating a response. On the first occasion we brought together the Airways Consultative Joint Action Committee, which embraced the broad forces within the airport. On the GAS issue we were instrumental in the formation of the Airport Liaison Committee. Today we've discussed a fresh crisis in the industry—that of industrial democracy. But this crisis is of a different order to the last two. It requires an offensive posture by the movement, not a defensive one. It requires facing three nationalised companies British Airways, the British Airports Authority, and the Civil Aviation Authority. These three state corporations interact effectively on the management side, and with government on policy questions. We are ill-equipped to present a co-ordinated view across the industry. We need to take an initiative to pull trade union representatives and the work force in the three state corporations together. It has to extend way beyond the shop floor. It is a matter of getting to grips with the policy being concluded behind the scenes at government level, and in liaison between the heads of our various state corporations. There's no easy solution, but the party should bring together the organised forces, not only at Heathrow, but at Gatwick, Glasgow and elsewhere, formulate policies and give the shopfloor some guidance. We know from experience that when we've done it in the past they will react to it.

We've talked about nationalisation and industrial democracy, but only in the sphere of civil aviation. Concretely that's the only way we can discuss it, because we work in the industry. But nationalisation is much broader than civil air transport. We've mentioned aerospace, where a link is needed to ensure British Airways pursued a national purchasing policy. Workers in shipbuilding, the Post Office, or wherever, are probably sitting down and having just the same sort of discussion. If in civil aviation we were able to go down the industrial democracy road and force an alternative position we would be isolated and vulnerable unless others came with us. We need to link up with other industries, other sectors. Individual and sectional aims will have to be sunk for the benefit of the movement as a whole.

Finally, can I say that this the second such conference we have held. And we have been able to put forward this kind of perspective because we have a party branch which functions regularly as a collective.

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Discussion

The Forward March of Labour Halted?

Stan Newens

(The writer is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Harlow)

Eric Hobsbawm's article "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" (M.T.D., September, 1978) pinpoints a number of symptoms of the stagnation of the socialist movement in Britain at the present time, which are extremely unpalatable to the Left. In his contribution, Ken Gill (December 1978) does not attempt to deny these—that Britain has slipped behind other countries in the percentage of workers organised in trade unions, that the Labour (plus Communist) vote has fallen back and that the number of socialist activists—particularly manual workers—has declined.

He prefers to ignore them and merely asserts that the development of a militant wages movement is the first priority. In so doing, as Peter Carter comments in his article (January 1979), he appears to be arguing that fighting for wages will eventually bring down capitalism—a doubtful proposition. The idea that socialism can be built on such a basis is even more dubious.

Wage Militancy

If wage militancy were a measure of socialist drive, some American trade unions would be leading the vanguard. However, as they regularly demonstrate, it is perfectly possible to combine the toughest trade union bargaining methods with a wholehearted commitment to capitalism.

Although Ken Gill argues that wage struggles in the era of state monopoly capitalism are no longer pure wage struggles, this is certainly what they are in the eyes of the majority of the participants. Far from believing that society is in need of radical reorganisation, they believe it is a question of forcing employers to pay up, and they join up to advance their own sectional interests.

In fact, wage militancy frequently goes hand in hand with a belief in the fundamental viability of the system. Insofar as socialists argue, like Kevin Halpin (February 1979), that industry is tremendously profitable, it follows that striking for more pay is all that is required to improve living standards. Political action is subordinate to this and of marginal importance only.

It is only when it becomes part of the consciousness of large numbers of workers and their families that enterprises are unable to survive, and that the system as a whole is incapable of resolving these problems, that political activity in favour of root and branch change can be generated on a broad front. In 1945, there was a mass conviction, based upon years of mass experience with Tory or near-Tory governments at the helm, that only the political action to which the Labour Party was pledged would prevent a return to the stagnation and unemployment of the 1930s.

The experience of the last generation has been very different. With all its faults, the welfare state provides a safety net for the elderly, the unemployed, the sick and most who fall upon difficult times, which did not exist in pre-war days. A Labour government has been in power more than the Conservatives in recent years and, along with all its caution, equivocation and reliance on bureaucracy, has been identified at least by many younger people with the establishment. It has been possible for whole sections of the work force to achieve improvements in living standards through trade union activity pure and simple. The fact that a Labour government has frequently been under attack from the left as well as the Conservatives has helped to spread the impression that the issues are trivial and personal.

This was reflected in the recent General Election in which Labour sustained a catastrophic defeat in southern England. The grown-up children of solid Labour parents voted Conservative in huge numbers in the suburbs, the outer metropolitan areas, new towns and overspill areas. They have come to accept the basic values and ideology of a capitalist society and have no consciousness of the need for fundamental change.

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Capitalism in Crisis

Yet capitalism is in very deep crisis. Far from making huge profits, many key enterprises would have collapsed but for huge state subsidies. This is true in steel, shipbuilding, motor cars, machine tools, and a myriad of enterprises dependent on them. The fundamental basis of the capitalist crisis is the decline in the rate of profit and this is manifest in the economic crisis of the moment.

The argument of socialists should not therefore be based on the contention that every demand can be met from profits or from some source related to it, which may convince at Ford but will not at Leyland. The case for socialism rests on the proposition that the contradictions of capitalism will eventually cause it to fail and grind to a halt.

This is what is happening before our very eyes. Industries are failing and Britain is being de-industrialised. Owing to the relative scarcity of certain raw materials, but above all oil and energy, capitalist booms of the old variety can never really get started before they produce enormous inflationary pressures which are nothing to do with wage increases but rising oil prices. Increasingly, the governments of capitalist countries are co-operating to achieve anti-inflationary, i.e., essentially low growth, policies.

A Socialist Alternative

Socialists ought therefore to be emphasising the alternatives to the stagnation and chronic crisis of contemporary capitalism and advancing programmes designed to achieve them. Trade unionists—particularly those in the white collar and public sector who have only comparatively recently been recruited on the basis of defending their own sectional interests—must be won over to supporting these programmes.

The relevance of the extension of social ownership (for example to banks and financial institutions even for those employed in them), economic planning, opening the books, industrial democracy and control over what is produced needs to be driven home. Similarly the desirability of providing aid and credit to developing countries on a generous scale not only in the interests of international solidarity but to enlarge employment opportunities at home, ought to be argued.

There is even at the present time a certain amount of groundswell among shop stewards, environmentally orientated groups and others which indicates that such ideas are being generated independently. Unfortunately socialists are not always backing this—not to speak of the official trade union movement, whose half-hearted response to the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards' plan and other similar initiatives is typical.

Dangers of Sectionalism

It would, of course, be wrong to suggest that the setback to Labour's forward march is merely the result of failing to advance the right policies. Objective conditions over which we have very little control fundamentally determine mass consciousness. If, however, as seems inevitable, the crisis of the capitalist system continues and deepens, its credibility will be increasingly undermined and people will become more receptive to alternative ideas. In such circumstances, the advocacy and application of relevant programmes can greatly accelerate the change of consciousness necessary for moving forward towards a socialist goal.

If, however, we blandly assume that all that is required is to fight the class struggle in terms of wages and conditions and at some unspecified future date, in some unspecified and unfathomed way, organised Labour will turn to socialism, we may well find that sectionalism will gain ground, racialism may flourish and catastrophic disasters may ensue.

Ken Gill's argument that the movement's forward march is marked by the replacement of the Deakins and Lawthers by the Jones' and the Scanlons has already been overtaken by the replacement of the Scanlons by the Duffys—a development which may yet produce dramatic setbacks in the higher councils of the TUC and the Labour Party.

The return of a Conservative government under Mrs. Thatcher, whatever its effects in galvanising the labour movement into a new burst of activity, must be seen as an expression of the failure of the Left. It is not enough to assume that revulsion at the effects of her policies will automatically carry us forward anew. The painful truths in Eric Hobsbawm's article will remain.

If the Left can formulate and advocate a relevant political strategy, however, we shall be in a much better position to take advantage of any new impetus. Such a strategy must rule out proposals for accepting capitalism. We need to face up to the problems of world poverty, the destruction of the environment, the exhaustion of resources, the energy crisis and the dangers of world war and show that these can only be tackled by radical steps involving drastic cuts in arms, the extension of social ownership, real economic planning designed to produce for need not just profit, the introduction of genuine industrial and political democracy, increased overseas aid, etc. Proposals to achieve these can be linked to the ordinary day to day needs and aspirations of the British people and provide a comprehensive alternative to the increasingly crisis-ridden conditions of our times.

Only on such a basis will Labour's forward march be resumed with any real hope of building a socialist society.

Published by the Communist Party, 16 King Street, London, WC2E 8HY, and printed by Farleigh Press Ltd. (T.U.), Watford, Herts.—27788

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